

LINGO DAN

PERCIVAL POLLARD

Rare

VINCENT STARRETT

FROM THE LIBRARY OF



FRIDOLF JOHNSON

2173

GO 530
99 32

Michael Stanger II

LINGO DAN

A N O V E L

BY

PERCIVAL POLLARD

*Author of "The Imitator," "Cape of Storms,"
"Dreams of Today," Etc.*

WASHINGTON, D. C.

THE NEALE PUBLISHING COMPANY

431 ELEVENTH STREET

MCMIII

COPYRIGHT, 1903, BY PERCIVAL POLLARD

This book is dedicated to Ambrose Bierce, Lingo
Dan's first friend.

P. P.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2014

<https://archive.org/details/lingodannovel00poll>

PREFACE

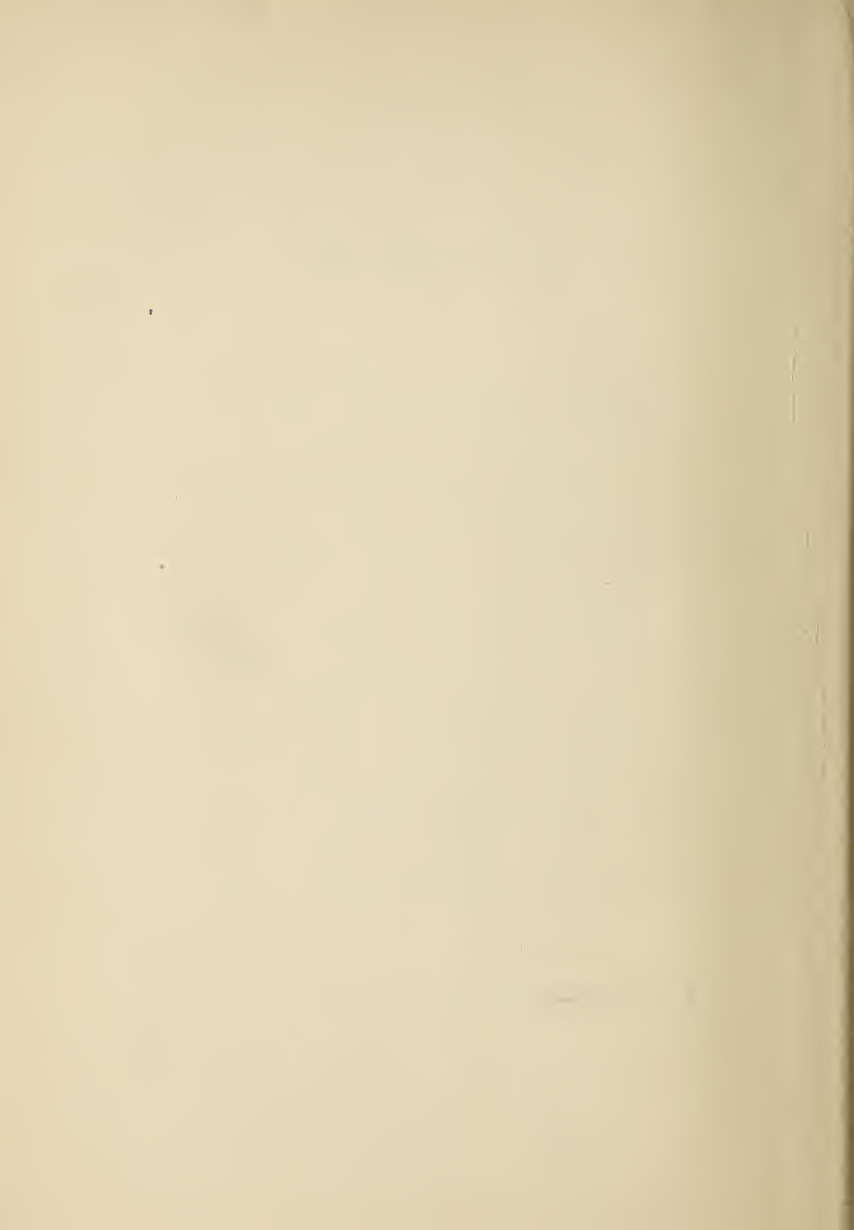
Lest this book perturb too mightily some of our Gaboriaus of criticism, let me set down here the fact that my hero and his companion were first introduced to the world by me in 1894 through the San Francisco *Argonaut*. A judge, more given to austerity than leniency, saw fit to remark that LINGO DAN was a new type in American fiction. In that belief I still venture to continue, despite the fact that he has, since first quietly making his bow, had many rivals more conspicuous than himself in the line of thought and conduct he adorns. If it be objected against me that I have delayed nearly ten years in thus continuing the chronicle begun in 1894, I retort that even this has taken a deal of temerity; my gentleman is still alive, and there is no knowing what form his reproaches for these indiscretions of mine may take.

P. P.

WASHINGTON, 1903.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I In Which An Important Duet is Introduced Without Any Ceremony.....	9
II In Which the Dignity of Honest Labor and Cheque Books is Eloquently Set Forth..	24
III Which Exposes Some of the Vicissitudes That May Befall a Country Sheriff	40
IV In Which There is a Meeting of Two Em- perors, and in Which the Stars and Stripes are Waved—and Saved.....	56
V Telling of Some Rifle Bullets and the In- vention of a Somewhat Splendid Lie....	87
VI In Which it is Shown How One May Enter Society Without Being Introduced	99
VII From Which it Would Appear That Ducks May be Preferable to Ducats	115
VIII Which Dwells Upon Lingo Dan's Method of Beautifying the Suburbs... ..	137
IX Concerning Murder and Some Speculation in Comedy	149
X In Which There is a Glimpse of Arcady...	163



CHAPTER I

IN WHICH AN IMPORTANT DUET IS INTRODUCED WITHOUT ANY CEREMONY

The snow that lined the sides of what the railroad men of that section called the "Brighton Cut" was, fortunately for two persons who suddenly found themselves transported from the cold hospitality of a freight-car to the colder embraces of the wide, white world that encompassed the track, very deep. After a moment or two of partial insensibility, more the result of bewilderment than of actual physical hurt, these two lifted their heads up out of the white counterpane that clung to them like some active envelope, and looked after the train that was now merely a mist of smoke and an echo faint beyond the curves of the forest.

"H'm," said the first one of the two derelicts to rise and shake the snow off his thin form, "that was a fearful breach of hospitality. We invest a common carrier, so termed in law, with the dignity of carrying such uncommon personages as ourselves, and this—this is the treatment we receive! Billy, this is a heathen country!" He took off his cap and passed eight

long and bony fingers through his snow-invested hair.

"Damn his eyes!" said Billy. He was a person of few words, and fewer attractions. He was short, and his general effect was toward the loutish.

"Yes," the other replied, looking about him, "I have no doubt you are right. Billy, your explanation is a most agreeable one. It was owing to some curious defect in that brakeman's eyes, doubtless, that he failed to notice our high estate; if any part of him is to suffer condemnation, it is his eyes. Billy, I agree with you; say it again!"

Billy, for a brief minute, looked as if he would like to include other and nearer eyes in his anathema. He contented himself, however, with a muttered "Argh!" a circular look at the prospect of sloping meadow-land, and a "What next, cully?"

"Stranded as we are upon an apparently shoreless sea of snow," responded the gentleman addressed, "our next move should be toward shelter." He paused to kick some snow out of a boot that was, as to the toes, over-hospitable to the elements. "This is a dismal spot!"

To tell the truth, the "Brighton Cut" is one of the bleakest places in the State. The railway track comes winding down a steep grade until it reaches this cut; the soil thereabouts is not tillable, and there are no fences for over half a

mile. A thin strip of forest shuts out the western view. On a gray afternoon in midwinter it looks very lonely, and there is something in the silence of it, after the rattle of a freight-train has echoed away, that strikes a chill even when the sun is shining. It was no wonder, then, that to these two, just stranded there from the comparatively warm recesses of a lumber-car, the place should seem decidedly dismal. They were used to dismal things, to be sure; but that ever-present yearning for luxury and its attendant in exertion—a yearning that had made them what they were—rebelled at every repetition of the unwelcome reality. It is not necessary to state very particularly who these two were. The one with the tall frame and the taller language might have been a great many things, some of them great; the fact that he was none of these is explanation enough for his title as a tramp. As for the other one, it is doubtful whether he had ever had even possibilities; he was, by lapse of all other capabilities, a tramp for sure. Just as it is sufficient of a man to say that he is a king, so it is enough introduction to make certain that he is a tramp. These two were indubitably tramps. It was evident in the consummate grace with which they wore their curiously allotted clothes. It was patent in the air of nobility that stamped them as true lords of the air. It was on their breath.

"I may say, without exaggeration," continued the taller of the two, "that this is a place unfit for such as we are to rest in. Wherefore, let us reconnoitre."

As they passed up the slope toward the north it began to snow steadily. Over in the west, the faint, gray light of day was dimming to the almost colorless shade of white upon white. It was an arduous task, stamping through the drifting snow. From time to time one might have heard, had one been within earshot, the voice of Billy, cursing as he walked.

* * * * *

On what is known in that county as the Brighton Mill Road, there is, for the most part, a sprinkling of as fine farms as there are anywhere in the West. The farm-houses are well-painted, and the barns are roomy and new enough to be the envy of many a man who has gone further toward the plains and rented a log cabin. For a distance of about a mile, east and west, however, this highway passes through a barren district that is marked by nothing save a tumble-down shanty, with a roof the bricks of which have fallen eastward. This shanty stands at a point where the highway is nearest to that point on the railway known as the "Brighton Cut," on the summit of the arid slope leading down to the rails. For a good many years this shanty had been the home, if one may use the word so lightly, of a certain

Doc Middals, concerning whom but little seemed to be known, save that he was "baching it." Just what presumption of ownership or interest in the shanty or its surroundings went with Middals's system of occupation there seemed to be no one willing to testify. This Doc Middals was a queer fellow who rarely spent more than a month or two at a time in the shanty, and his goings and comings were so erratic, his place so remote from the view of other habitations, that the question of his presence or absence was always an open one. The farmers who passed on the highway had long since given up speculating on the subject; Middals frequently denied himself a fire even in midwinter, so not even the absence of smoke about the shattered chimney was proof positive of the man's presence elsewhere.

It was in this cottage that Lingo Dan—by this *sobriquet* was the taller of the two tramps, who had been lately deposited in the "Brighton Cut" by an inhospitable brakeman, known in such circles as knew him at all intimately—and his partner Billy were housed about a week after their advent in that part of the country. By a marvelous, instinctive faculty of penetration, of stilling his own curiosity, Lingo Dan had fully possessed himself of all the facts in connection with that shanty before he entered it.

Covered by the drifting of the snow, the presence of these two was absolutely unknown to a soul. In the driving storm that followed their arrival like a wail of omen, all their tracks through the snow had been obliterated.

Looking out of the eastern window of the Middals shanty, Lingo Dan gave a sigh of admiration. The sun was making a million diamonds dance about the crust of snow that stretched away over the fields and on the highway; it was like a rollicking cowboy shooting until his victims dance for dear life. Clear as crystal, the air was intensely sensitive to tone; a far-off ringing of sleigh-bells sounded with a distinctness that belied distance. Out of the blue of the sky, the glitter of the sun, and the fierce purity of the snow, there arose a splendid dazzlement that blinded unaccustomed eyes.

"It would be pathetic," mused Lingo Dan aloud, after passing his hand over his eyes to shut out the glare that began to hurt him. "if we should find our opportunity on such a day. Look, Billy, what a day it is! H'm, I had not thought this country capable of so magnificent an effect. And yet, do you know, I think it is going to snow again before night."

Billy offered no reply. He was engaged in cleaning out a rifle, and at intervals he contorted his face into a squint so that he might gauge the nicety of the barrel's internal polish.

"When I come to consider the matter," Lingo Dan went on, "I begin to regret my harsh words anent that brakeman. He was, as I now see it, an instrument of a benign providence. Providence is, indeed, singularly benign. What could be handier to our purpose than this cottage and its associations? Occupied by a harmless hermit, it takes on all the innocuousness possible. Benign providence! This man Midgals is absent, leaving us his shanty and his shooting irons. Benign providence! I feel it in my veins, now tingling with the excitement so beautiful a day has put me in, that there will presently come some one whose necessity is not so great as ours. In the interests of liberty and equality, we must relieve his person of its valuables ere we release him. I trust he will not resist. I sincerely trust so. But if he does ——" He looked at Billy's employment. "Is it clean?"

"Slick as grease," was Billy's answer.

"Benign providence!"

It was as if in response to Lingo Dan's devout utterance that the eastern hilltop became at this moment slightly clouded with a fine powdery mist. Then the forms of two persons on horseback appeared upon the slope; it was evident that their ascent of the farther side had been accomplished at a canter. Even at that distance, so clear was the day, the breath of the horses' nostrils could be seen rising about them

like a halo. At the first sight of them, Lingo Dan, smiling unctuously, said: "Ah, Billy, our prey approaches."

"One?"

"No; there are two of them. They are riding. One is a man; the other, a woman. They are young. Judging by their present loitering and the interest each exhibits in the other, I should say they were lovers."

"No good—they ain't!" Billy gave the rifle a last vicious wipe, and laid it upon a shelf.

"Haste, my boy, is a dangerous indulgence. I beg to differ; I think we are in particularly good luck. Such slight observance of the ways of my kind as I have been able to take has taught me that in certain walks of life a young man never permits himself the company of a young lady without being sure that he has money in his pocket. Yonder young man is of that walk in life. There are, you see, so many possibilities, such contingencies, that to provide one's self with money before providing one's self with a companion is merely to prove one's appreciation of the world we live in; this applies to a ride of an hour as well as to a marriage for life."

Billy was apparently used to such lengthy philosophics, for he replied, as if unconscious of the other's wordy efforts: "Say! How about getting away?"

"Easy—ridiculously easy. After obtaining the reward of our exertions, we drift gently down the slope to the railway, and presently, boarding a freight, turn our faces to the Golden West. I have observed a ledge of rock from which we can easily propel ourselves on to the moving cars while the train is toiling up the steep grade of the cut. We will not be found—if we ever are—until many miles have been traversed; an *alibi* will be complete."

"But our tracks from here to the cut?"

"Billy, you are singularly slow. Do you see that cloud on the horizon? Before night it will snow; our foot-marks will be utterly wiped out."

Billy considered a moment. Then he said, triumphantly: "But the impressions will harden this surface; they'll get on to us if ever they sweep away the new fall of snow."

Lingo Dan shrugged his shoulders. "Whence the inspiration of that remark, I know not. I think you must have been reading Conan Doyle. Well, you can be quite sure that there is no Sherlock Holmes in this part of the country. Dear me!"

At this last exclamation Billy looked curious. "What's up?" he asked.

For an instant or two Lingo Dan made no reply. He was looking intently at the highway on which the two riders were approaching. In point of fact, the occurrence that at-

tracted his attention was singular enough. As they rode slowly, side by side, down the slope of the road that came to the shanty from the east, the young man's left arm slowly disengaged itself from the reins of his horse and passed behind the waist of his human companion; their bodies and their heads came gently, carefully together; the girl's hand went up to her chin, detaching the veil and relegating it to her forehead, and then her arm encircled the young man; their faces met in a kiss. The horses' heads hung down and their feet ambled leisurely; tired after their hill-climbing canter, they took this respite thankfully enough. It was a kiss that lasted longer than do most kisses; the adventurous circumstances and the perilous nature of their position tended to fill both these riders with the advisability of making the most of bliss; to them, the kiss was but an infinitesimal instant of happiness; to any one not concerned in it, its length would have seemed an eternity. All these things the watcher in the cottage observed.

"It is evident," he said, presently, "that this is no ordinary case. They are lovers, but they are also more: they are eloping. This complicates matters. It makes our booty greater, but it increases the—h'm—the difficulty. Yes, I am afraid this will be a—what did we say in the Quadrangle?—*a mauvais quart d'heure*."

"What're you drivin' at?" Billy glowered at his companion in evident disgust at his high-flown phrases.

"My dear Billy, here are the facts: Two persons, when they elope, are preparing for a future; hence, the young man lines his pockets before he starts. He lines his pockets, however, both from without and within. Realizing the risk he is running, he puts pistols in his hip-pockets, as well as a purse over his breast."

"I reckon that's likely."

"Thank you. Your acquiescence, Billy, soothes a spirit slightly ruffled by the prospect of discourtesy. For, to tell the truth, I fear we shall have to—h'm—silence these two first, and inquire afterward. It would be so infernally unpleasant, you see, if he got the drop on us. Understand, then, that we are not to take risks. You, Billy, will sight for the girl; I'll take the man."

There was a click as Billy sent the hammer of his rifle to the full-cock. Lingo Dan stretched out his long arm, picked up the other weapon and rested the barrel carefully on the window-sill.

The riders were quite close to the house, and the love in the eyes of each shone out with a sort of spiritual brilliance. They leaned together again and joined lips in a long, delicious kiss.

And while they kissed, two shots rang out on the crystal air.

* * * * *

An old woman living on the outskirts of Libertytown rejoices in the peculiar *sobriquet* of Mrs. Early Worm. This is, one can only suppose, due to her habit of rising at a most infinitesimal hour, in midwinter as well as in midsummer. As to her reasons for this singular course, there is nothing but conjecture. She is said to have driven her husband to an early grave, and then, overcome by remorse, to have sworn to seek none but an early grave herself. However that may be, the things that Mrs. Early Worm saw on the morning of the twentieth of February, 189-, are facts, and have nothing to do with the realm of conjecture.

When she arose, the world was still, in spite of its coating of snow, very dark. There was light, to be sure, of that curious, indefinite gray that distinguishes the birth of a day in winter time. She was proceeding to the woodshed to pick up the usual armful of kindling-wood for the kitchen stove, when suddenly she said, "Land sakes, what is that?" and stood stock-still in the middle of the yard.

What she saw was this: Through the gray dawn light that hung between the earth's white coverlet and the night's flying wings of sable, there approached the apparition of two horses and two riders. In the gray haze they shone

like angels of whiteness; that was the awful part of it—they were all white! Against the horizon, where night still held sway, their forms were cut as clearly as in ivory. As they came nearer, the old woman, shivering now with cold and fear, observed that one rider was a man, the other, a girl. They sat motionless, rigid, as if carved of marble. They were covered with frost from head to foot; they were white with the hue of cold. The horses, as they stepped rhythmically forward, blew out mists of steam that came back to them frozen coatings of ice.

The old woman, with an effort, found energy enough to wrench herself out of the strange, lethargic fascination she had been in. She began to run, as fast as her old legs could carry her, toward the nearest house, about a hundred yards away.

Presently the entire village was aroused to the presence of this ghastly phenomenon.

Heedless of the terror they occasioned, the horses stepped on with a tired and even gait.

And now it was observed that the riders were linked together, that the two were one, that here was some awful unity of horror. Their arms were intertwined, their faces touching. The man's right hand held his horse's reins and a hunting-crop, while his left was about the girl's waist; her right was about his shoulders, and her left held the reins. Their shoulders

touched; it was as if they were hewn out of one stone.

But there was no breath from their nostrils. White as ghosts, still as eternity, they rode on into the heart of the village.

Numb with dread, no one dared approach them. All knew their faces well; no one spoke their names; even curiosity was stifled in the greatness of their terror.

With the resonant clamor of iron shoes upon wood, both horses ascended the slight sloping entrance to the livery barn. Roused by the sound, the livery man came out of his office. He looked, in dazed astonishment, at these colorless, silent, motionless riders, he noticed what no one had yet seen: upon the breast of each a crimson stain, not quite hidden by the coating of frost.

"Great God!" he said; "they're stone dead!"

* * * * *

The sun, shimmering through the planks of a lumber-car, part of a freight-train traveling through the farther West, rested for an instant on the eyes of Lingo Dan as he slept the sleep of the careless. Its radiance woke him; he rubbed his eyes, gave Billy a nudge with his elbow, and said: "Hello, Billy; here we are again!"

"Oh," grunted Billy, viciously, "you be d——d!"

“I admit it, Billy; I probably shall be. What for? For gross incompetence in judging the idiocy of a man in love. For, I leave it to any one, is it conceivable that any one but a lunatic would start upon a voyage for life, with a life-companion, without a *sou* in his pocket? A lunatic, Billy, is, as I now see, a simile for a man in love. Billy, when I was at college I played tennis; in tennis, love means nothing. It is the same here. Let us go to sleep again. Great Greeley!—without a *sou*—without a *sou*!”

Turning over, they went to sleep again.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH THE DIGNITY OF HONEST LABOR AND
CHEQUE BOOKS IS ELOQUENTLY
SET FORTH

To the sound of the rattling husks being pulled from the yellow maize came the voice of Lingo Dan.

"It is passing wonderful," he said, "what a fascination your industry has for me, Billy! There is something so rare, so unusual, so bizarre, about it! Indeed, this past month or so—how quaint our lives have been. We have been engaged in honest toil——"

"You, eh?" Billy grunted, and stuffed some husks into a sack so viciously that the sharp edges of the dry leaves cut his hand like a knife. "Yes, you have—like Hell!" He wiped the scarred hand across his hair.

"My good Billy, you forget the ethic basis of the division of labor. It is true that yours has been of the hands—here is a handkerchief, Billy, to bind over that somewhat unsightly cut; a kerchief washed by Miss Molly's own fair hands, I dare say—while mine has been of

the head. I have been planning our deliverance, Billy. Do you think these elaborations come to me of their own accord? You judge me too highly." He stretched his legs out at full length, and, his hands clasped behind his head, stared out through a chink of the log-built crib. He sighed. From without came the monotonous buzzing of the cotton gin. "Why is it, Billy," he went on, "that we can not find contentment in these peaceful ways of life? Think, Billy—to watch the white fluffs of cotton blossoming on one's own land; to hear the wind whispering in the aisles of one's own cornfield; to feel that just so much of fair fresh air and sunshine was one's own—were it not pleasant?—I beg your pardon? Oh—really, Billy, your language is scarce academic. But you are right—we hardly seem the proper figures for that setting. We lack some atom of the elemental human; we are the victims of our versatilities." For a time there was no sound save that of the savage ripping with which Billy denuded the ears of corn. Then the other spoke again, in a voice from which the abstract and the dreamy was suddenly absent. "You are sure we were not noticed that Sunday?"

"Sure!" said Billy.

"And that you have your part of the business well in mind?"

"Dead easy."

"Then it becomes merely a question as to how soon that coquette, Opportunity, chooses to beckon to us. Hush a moment, Billy! Yes, our friend, the Deacon, approaches."

Billy handed over a sack that was half full of the corn shucks. When the farmer whose hired men these two were, opened the door of the crib and called them to dinner, Lingo Dan was husking the one ear of corn that had engaged his attention that day.

When his daughter Mollie was setting the table for supper that evening, Sam Travis, familiar to the fellow members of his church as Deacon Travis, came in from the kitchen chuckling to himself. "Been a'figuring things out," he said, "and dinged if the two of 'em's done a speck more'n one man's work o' shucking that there corn! One man's work—and we feeds the two of 'em. But the fact is I sorter reckon listening to the tall cuss is as good as reading a magazine. Ever know sech a gift o' gab, Mollie?"

"No. But he never learnt it on a farm!"

"That's right, too, Moll; but I ain't a'going to make no man's past lead me to the sin of curiosity, Moll — leastwise not in Texas. Ah—h! Wish your mother was alive to smell that cornbread o' yours, Moll!"

Molly smiled with pleasure. But as the others came in, and while she moved about serving the dishes, her face took on lines of

pain. Presently her father noticed that she was making the merest pretence of eating. "Ain't you well, Moll?" he asked.

"One o' my headaches, dad," was the girl's answer.

"Too bad! An' to-morrow Sunday! The first Sunday 'the month; an' me not there to pass the plate!" Deacon Travis passed his cup for more tea, and sighed sadly.

"I'm sorry, dad. Can't you go without me?"

"No—sir! Not much! Got to see to your having camphor on your forehead right along."

There was a coughing noise from Lingo Dan. "If you really find yourself unable to go, would it be asking too much, might the buggy be allowed to take my companion and myself to holy worship? It is—not often," he paused and smiled wistfully at the Deacon, "that we have a chance."

Deacon Travis looked pleased. "Sure thing, you can have the team. Never thought you was given to churchgoing; might 'er asked you before. Sure you know the way?"

"Perfectly; it is very kind of you."

When they were alone with each other once more, Deacon Travis remarked to his daughter that it was perhaps a sort of special Providence that had given her a headache, so that two thirsty souls might have an opportunity to drink of the spiritual waters of the Word.

Which philosophic point of view, however, was not completely cheering to Miss Mollie herself.

The little frame church, where the farmers of that region are wont to congregate every Sunday, stands on a slight lift of the prairie, where a narrow cross road leaves the North Road for the mountains. Nowhere else in the world would these hills be termed mountains; but here, contrasting vividly enough with the monotonous level of the prairie, they seem somehow, to merit the title easily enough. Cedar-clad, these mountains make the horizon, at one point of the compass at least, green and fresh and picturesque. In the hot days, that are the rule in Texas, the shade of these cedars becomes a veritable oasis for travelers whose road takes them in that direction.

And it may be possible that many of the good farm folk being driven churchward that bright, torrid Sunday morning, would have preferred, in their heart of hearts, the cool of the cedar mountains to the hot church benches. Still, if such thoughts came to them while the white dust skurried with and behind their wheels, they put them away again as speedily as possible. They felt that they had every right to be proud of having a church at all. There were communities, in the same county, and not such a vast distance away, either, that were as godless as they were unprosperous. To feel that their own congregation was one made up of

well-to-do folk, and to drive through the fields that showed such bountiful harvests was to be glad, also, that they had had the grace, years ago, to call to them a clergyman from the East, to build a church, to support it in every fitting, and, frequently, many a magnificent way. Good fortune, or good judgment, had ordained that the Rev. Martin Dawson prove himself exactly the best pastor in the world for that community. He was an oldish man, not too much the doctrinarian, a pleasant companion personally, and popular not only with the members of his congregation, but with the Eastern folk he had left when coming to Texas. His popularity, and the pleasant manner of his life reacted happily upon his congregation in another direction. After his old college chum, the Rev. James Langan, had paid him a visit some years ago, such glowing reports had been taken back East that thereafter this little Texas farm community had constantly the advantage of hearing many really admirable preachers in their little church. When their good pastor arose as the services opened, and introduced to them his "brother in the Lord" from say Hartford, and there followed a sermon as elequent as occurs in the towns only where the pew rents are based on such incomes as millionaires have, these good people were no longer surprised. They listened, with interest and gratitude, and thanked fortune once more for giving them

such a pastor. As for the visiting clergymen, such visits to their old friend Dawson were by way of holiday. That none of these visitors were the kind that might attempt any discourse tinged with indoor rather than outdoor theology, was a point rigorously watched by Mr. Dawson.

The Rev. Martin Dawson was a bachelor. Alone with an old servant, who now acted as sexton, verger and church warden rolled into one, he lived in a small house some two miles from the church, on the road that eventually passed Sam Travis' farm. Every Sunday morning these two old people betook themselves with surplice and sermon into the little road wagon, and allowed a lazy, easy-going grey mare to convey them leisurely to church. Then followed the duties of the day; the minister prayed and preached, his servant took up the collection. There were some moments in which the minister, his surplice laid aside, chatted cheerily with the members of his congregation, refusing, perhaps, many an invitation to dinner, and then home again, behind the grey mare to convey them leisurely to church. Frequently, to be sure, there was the clerical visitor also; and once or twice it had happened that the visitor had come alone with the old servant, the Rev. Dawson being heir to a gout that, at times, took him quite off his feet.

As the many vehicle of various shapes and capacities came bowling along the dusty roads that approached the church from the different points of the compass, one young farmer with sharper eyes than most people have, identified a buggy that was coming at right angles to his own.

"There's the Travis rig," he remarked to his wife.

"Mollie's been promising me a recipe for putting up Alexandrias; I hope to goodness she ain't forgot it today."

"I reckon," he went on, "you'll have to wait for that recipe. It's the Travis rig, but it ain't the folks. Looks more like some of parson's friends."

"Shaw—I'm sorry! One of Moll's headaches, I guess." And they drove on, joggedly.

In the Travis buggy, Lingo Dan was discoursing on the curious inconsistencies in human nature.

"A dear old soul, that parson! Eh, Billy—a dear old soul! But only human, after all. No strength of spiritual warp can break the bonds imposed by such coarse creature things as—as ourselves. I hardly think it likely he can break that rope unaided. And as for the partner of the righteous household, I believe you corded him up pretty securely, didn't you, Billy? Yes, I think we may be sure they are safely fettered for a while. Quite allegorical,

this act of ours, Billy; do you not note the allegory? The fetters of the flesh—fetters of the flesh; if your education, Billy, had not been shamefully neglected, you would find many a Sunday school memory in that dear old phrase: The fetters of the flesh. In a measure I regret that force was necessary. A crude thing, after all, is force. If one had been able to obtain their promises, their holy oaths—how much finer, how much more of the age of Honor! But that—that was impossible. A dear old soul! But short in his breath—very short! And then the inconsistency of him—did you note that? While he thought we merely came for common robbery, he seemed to feel little, save, perhaps regret for our misguided ways; but the instant I laid hands on his sermon and his surplice—Olympus, that was a mighty rage, eh, Billy! I was glad I had him bound by that time; had he been free just then, his rage—there is no telling what the dear old soul might not have done. A wonderfully inconsistent thing, human nature! Faceted like the brilliant; as full of surprises as—the weather!”

During all this monologue, jerked out with sudden silences, and laughings, at intervals, Billy sat stolidly binding a handkerchief about one hand.

“Bit me,” he growled, “old beast!”

“Hush, Billy! A sexton—your late antagonist—a sexton, a man whose solemn office it is

to aid materially the Last, the Great Divorce—the soul's decree of separation from the body—to call such a man a—a beast—oh, Billy!"

As they neared the church their eyes caught gladly the sight of the numerous vehicles standing about the fence, and approaching on the different highways.

"It is a case of 'Auspice Deo,' " Lingo Dan went on. "Eh, Billy? Nil desperandum, auspice Deo! Observe what a pleasant congregation we are to have. Glorious, glorious! You have the key to the vestry?"

"Right here," Billy tapped his pocket.

"And for my part—how delightful are the ways and means of modern civilization sometimes—the dear old soul's sermon is typewritten! Although," and here the speaker lowered his voice, as if unwilling to parade whatever had the least glimmer of vanity about it, "I dare say I should not be so utterly bad at an impromptu. I have known the time—in days that are now dead—"

"And buried!" This came from Billy like a fierce reproach. It was evident that gropings into the past had no more charms for him.

Lingo Dan looked slightly hurt. "True—most true. How close to the mark you do shoot, Billy—never a divergence, never a stroll into the abstract—ah, sometimes I believe I envy you, Billy."

But Billy only grunted. It was the grunt of unbelief.

In a few moments they had reached the vestry door. Billy hitched a rope from the bridle to the fence. Then he opened the vestry door, and the two of them stepped in. Billy noted with dull astonishment that his partner slipped into the surplice with apparent knowledge of its technique. Then the organ began the services of the day.

When the music ceased, a tall, pale figure arose beside the desk that faced the altar railings.

"Dearly beloved brethren," said the strange clergyman, "my portion in these services was merely to have been the sermon, but sudden indisposition coming to your good pastor, Mr. Dawson, I am here to make what shift I can as substitute."

There was a pause. The speaker's eyes swept about the church. Every seat was taken. But in every face he saw nothing save kind encouragement. Far in the last row, deep in shadows, loomed the face of him that was called Billy. All this the clergyman saw in a flash. Then he began, in the conventional voice of the preacher:

"Dearly beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us in sundry places—" and thereafter the services continued drowsily and perfunctorially. There was nothing to show that the

official of the occasion was not versed and practiced in these devotional functions. At times the congregation caught a note of fervor, of loving emphasis placed on some phrase that was more than usually freighted with the poetry that informs the Prayer book; in the mere elocution of the man they scented a sermon that would make them forget even the stifling heat.

From outside came the occasional whinnying of a horse, and the pawing of impatient feet. Beyond that, only the heat, quivering against the fences in visible form.

On the back bench Billy was exerting the last vestiges of his self-control to keep from snoring.

When the general "Amen" had closed the rehearsal of the Creed, the preacher moved to the pulpit. With bowed head he stood silent for some seconds. Then he folded his sermon to his liking. As he read the text he flushed for a space, but his voice never faltered. It was from the gospel of St. Matthew, and it read:

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing."

It was a pity that the Rev. Dawson could not have heard the eloquent delivery his sermon was given by his locum tenens. Use blunts the faculties somewhat, and it is certain that had its actual author preached this sermon it had

not seemed half so powerful. As it was, each word, each phrase had behind it all the nervous vigor of a musical voice, a mind at high tension.

As he turned to the final page of the sermon an agonizing suspicion crossed the ear and the mind of the preacher. Was that a snore from the back bench?

If even the faintest chance of such a thing existed, it was necessary to grasp measures of force. Into the mere reading of another man's words it was possible to infuse but a limited amount of enthusiasm, after all.

Ostentatiously he closed the pamphlet from which he had been delivering his sermon. With eyes roving soulfully about the faces before him, he brought his voice to its most musical, gripping pitch.

"And so, my brethren," he exhorted, "sixthly and lastly, we approach the lesson to be learned. What is so rampant in the world to-day, as this hypocrisy, this wearing of the mask, the borrowed plume that Matthew warned against in the words of the text. The face is given man oft-times but to hide the soul. New doctrines come and go; men prate of new religion and new science; the traders on the world's trend-to-believe make bargains in the market place. And who, of us here, dare say that some time in his life he has not played the hypocrite? Have all of us worn naught

save these same garments, material and spiritual, that we stand in now? It is the one besetting sin; the cancer that is eating wholesome candor from the world. Here, in the open air, under the clear sky, you think the wearing of the mask can be but rarely. You err; the mask is worn, in city or in country. Look to your hearts and find the answer there. Look—" His voice roared up against the rafters, so that there was a quick shuffling heard from the rear bench, and the preacher's straining eyes caught the shine of Billy's amazement, and to himself he actually thanked God! "Look—deep in to your hearts!"

With something like a sob in his breath, the preacher turned his face to the East. "And now to the Father" muttered his voice. With the suspense over, the ring of eloquence was no longer necessary.

Then he turned to the table, looking apparently heavenwards, actually at Billy. As the latter lumbered up the aisle, the preacher droned in his monotone, standing with his hands folded in front of him.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works."

With these well-known texts, he proceeded the while Billy passed the wooden plate nervously up and down the pews. The envelopes containing the contributions fell with a shuffling sound of paper upon paper. There were

no casuals in this congregation; the actual sight of coin was hardly ever obtruded.

At last the collection was over. The plate, heaped up with white riches, stood beside the railing of the chancel. The preacher raced to the benediction.

After that, with a change in his voice, he came forward a step, and said:

"If the congregation will wait a few moments, I shall be glad to meet the individual members of it personally."

Those who watched him closely always declared that he had the most winning smile they had ever seen.

Then, with a quick snatch of the collection plate he hurried into the vestry. Into a corner went the surplice.

"Thank the Lord," he whispered to himself, "that this stuff's all folded in paper. Makes less noise." He slipped the money into a handkerchief and opened the outer door cautiously.

Another second or two and the Travis buggy was whirling over the highway to the mountains, a cloud of dust concealing it.

In the church the congregation awaited their meeting with one of the most eloquent preachers they had heard in many a day.

* * * * *

Several hours later, after a forced march through cedar brush that hid all tracks im-

penetrably, Lingo Dan and Billy stopped beside a mountain spring.

Spreading the contribution envelopes out on the cool rocks in the shadow of the hill that held the spring, Lingo Dan proceeded to open them, to count the gains from their adventure.

Billy got up with an oath.

Lingo Dan lay back on his back and roared with laughter. When he had breath enough, he said: "But Billy, do you count the sensation as nothing?"

Every contribution was a check.

CHAPTER III

WHICH EXPOSES SOME OF THE VICISSITUDES
THAT MAY BEFALL A COUNTRY
SHERIFF

The sheriff changed his rifle from his right arm to his left, and crossed his legs. He looked down the street nervously. He tried whistling. But that did not seem to soothe. Then from the corridor behind him, came the faint fume of a cigar that had certainly never been bought in Clay Oak.

A breath or two of amused profanity came from the Sheriff's lips. "Danged if the cuss ain't smoking perfectos in there, and me 'most so nervous I can't sit still!" He gave a little laugh and opened his nostrils to the scent of the cigar. "Kinder soothin'," he remarked to himself.

Half a mile down the street a little blue flag was fluttering in the breeze. It seemed to depend from a rod that was fastened to a fence, or projected from a window; at that distance it was impossible to distinguish aught save the little bit of azure itself. The Sheriff's eyes

rested constantly on the flag. Now and again his gaze attempted adventuring elsewhere, but some magnetism turned it always to the flag again. The Sheriff's thoughts were as active as quicksilver. If he had voiced them they would have been something like this:

"I'd liever they'd just concluded to surprise me than give me due warning with that there rag. Just don't seem able to keep my eyes offen it. Danged thing gives me the shivers. . . . But, come the worst, I'll do my duty. And I reckon the boys they know that. Not that I'm putting any blame on them. No. If so be as I wasn't Sheriff I don't know but what I'd be over yonder myself, waiting, and my hand on the rope, and—. But I'm Sheriff of this county."

With which summing up the watcher on the veranda of the Clay County jail continued his observance of the far-off patch of blue.

"I hope," said a soft and suave voice presently, from somewhere in the dark building behind the Sheriff, "that you will consider me nothing but solicitous for your peace of mind if I offer you a cigar. I seem to observe that you are nervous."

The Sheriff laughed staccato. "Maybe I am," he said, "maybe I am. Though it's you that has the most cause." He hesitated an instant or two, and then continued: "I don't know but what I will trouble you for some o'

them seegars. I reckon I don't have to ask you how you come by it."

"No," said the voice, "your immediate duties hardly include that."

They both smoked in silence for a time. Then the voice from within began again. "If you will allow me," it said, "I must congratulate you on being in charge of what I, as a connoisseur, have no hesitation in pronouncing the cleanest—er—little hostelry in my experience."

"Meaning the jail?" said the Sheriff. "Well I guess you're about right. Fact is, this county ain't hardly got no use for it. Take it in twelve months and there ain't enough doing—in your line"—he waved his cigar in the direction of the inner chambers—"in all of Clay County to keep the jail open two months. But the 'joining counties sends us in what they ain't got room for, every once in a while, and I earns my salary one way and another." He took a few whiffs at the cigar, looked at it lovingly, and continued: "Last week the Christian Endeavor Society held its meeting here."

"I assure you," responded the other smoker, "that my regret at destroying so peaceable a routine is infinite. I am really most wonderfully sorry. If it had not been for me, you might, I dare say, even now be guarding nothing more dangerous than a meeting of a Christian Endeavor Society. Moreover, I see this

little affair is getting onto your nerves. If I could only suggest something that I could do to alleviate the annoyances I bring upon you!" He paused and sighed audibly. "What a surpassingly peaceable community this must be!"

"You bet it is, stranger! We got more eddication, more peace and prosperity right here in this county than in any spot on this earth, I do believe." The Sheriff's rifle-butt came down on the floor of the veranda with a loud crash. "Damn it, what d'you want to come around here for, you and that cursed partner of yours? Gol darn you both for thieves and murderers!"

His voice hesitated a little before the last word.

In the matter of your last epithet," said the inmate of the jail, "are you rigidly exact, or do you—allow a temporary wave of passion to sweep you over the bar of fact?"

The Sheriff gaped an instant or two. "Wonder if he wasn't in the traveling dentist business once?" he thought. Then, his mind having groped through the other's maze of verbiage, he replied:

"Well, no; the parson ain't dead yet. And if you've got any kind of a knack at prayin' you can just pray that little old flag down yonder don't go to droppin about this time of day. 'Cos that'll mean the parson's gone, an' you're—."

"Forgive me," came the soft interruption, "if I seem rude in my slowness, but—let me understand you clearly. If the flag drops that is the signal of the Reverend—I am ignorant of his name; the honor of an introduction was not vouchsafed me—having passed into the—the beyond? It is. Thank you. And further—."

"And further that's the time you can do your prayin'. For the boys give it out to me that if the old man was to pass in his checks they wasn't proposing to wait for the next term of court as far as you was concerned." The Sheriff looked critically at his cigar and tilted his chair back so that he could cross his feet over the railing of the veranda and rest the barrel of his rifle between his boots.

From the inside of the jail came the noise of some one walking rapidly up and down, up and down. Then that noise ceased, and gave way to the sound of speech.

"In other words, this exemplary community—this model of what I think you called peace and prosperity—purposes to make use of the somewhat—pardon me if I seem frank!—somewhat primitive methods of Judge Lynch? I am exquisitely pained to think myself the cause of such a turbulent innovation. Really, I am sorry."

"You understand," resumed the Sheriff, "I'm here to do my duty. There's my duty be-

fore me just as straight as the street down to that little flag there, and here's my gun. The boys is all good friends of mine, but I read my duty clear, so I reckon they've got me to shoot or get shot by before they gets inside of this jail. 'Cos I'll shoot, sure as my name's Tod Minton!" He took a sight along the barrel of the rifle before he went on, with a vicious emphasis, "But don't you think I'm doing it for any love of you!"

"My dear Mr. Minton—you underrate my sense of your sanity. You are really, if I may venture to say so, something of an uncommon nature. I wish I had the chance to see more of you. Your stern devotion to duty strikes me as supremely quaint; it is quite the expression of an elementary adhesion to first principles." Again the inmate began to walk the floor of the jail. "What method," he added, presently, "are your friends likely to employ?"

"Oh," said the Sheriff, "the reg'lar thing: limb of a tree and a rope."

"Ah! Again the exquisitely simple essentials!" The prisoner resumed his locomotion. He began to mutter to himself. "Why doesn't it come to me? Ten minutes now since I began the search for the way out! There is a way—I know there is a way! There is always a way for the wise. The gods grant that that rascal Billy is staying within reach! Why doesn't it come to me—why, why?"

From outside came the sound of the Sheriff coughing. Next, he attempted to sing a line of a hymn.

What a curiously high-pitched voice the fellow has, thought the prisoner. And with that he stood suddenly still. A smile crept along the corners of his mouth, and he blew a ring of smoke into the air with a skill that betokened sudden complete peace. "Wonderful," he thought, "are the ways of Providence. Some day I should be glad of the leisure sufficient to let me put forth a monograph on the manifold protections Providence has accorded me." He stepped to the barred door, and silently surveyed the Sheriff. "He is about my height," he mused. "For the rest—it's merely a matter of the voice. Perhaps, after all, the days when I went barnstorming are to bear interest."

Along the street the shadows were lengthening. Presently the sun hung against the horizon, a huge ruddy disk, with the blue flag spotting its centre. It was like the bull's-eye on a target.

"Mr. Minton!"

The Sheriff looked back over one shoulder. "Well?"

"Concerning these friends of yours—the gentlemen with the crude intentions in the direction of my humble self—do you object to my expressing a curiosity! Time's wings are

tied for me, just now. Anything as a distraction—anything, even curiosity! What are some of their names? Who are they? If I were a little boy, I should say: Tell me a story; make me forget the actual. As it is—satisfy my curiosity. It's a whim—a foolish fancy."

"Well," replied the Sheriff, "I don't see as it'll do you any good, but it certainly ain't going to do me no harm. Some of the boys? Well, there's Jake Farren, he runs the O. K. Store, and breeds setter dogs. And Jim Oyers, he's in the berry raising business, and his little girl, Mattie, does most of the work. They'll surely be on hand, I reckon. And Marsh Quisenby, and Alec Grant, and—."

From a little distance off came the double signal of a passenger train.

"There's Number 7," the Sheriff interpolated. "It's getting 'most evening now."

"And what," asked the prisoner, "is Number 7?"

"Number 7's the westbound passenger. She stops up here at the junction for half an hour, to wait for Number 10, eastbound. They cross here."

"Thank you, thank you." The prisoner laughed with a fine ring of bitterness. "They declare, you know, that in the sight of death one evinces the most ridiculous interest in the minutiae of life. I dare say it is true." He turned from the door, and paced up and down

for several minutes. "In half an hour. Either of two trains—in half an hour. And that voice * * * * *."

Something about the prisoner's concluding remark, something in his bitter laugh—the ring of which seemed so true to the Sheriff, touched the sympathy of that official.

"Danged if I see," he remarked, "how a fellow of the kind of advantages 't appears to me you've had ever got so low down."

"A blindness, my dear Mr. Minton, that does you infinite credit. How are you, living in this quiet, lovely, sober corner of the world, to understand the feverish complexities that may be enmeshed in a life that spins always on the froth of the stream? You move in paths that are of an almost indecent plainness. You say: this is right, and that is wrong. You say that in attempting to persuade that aged person of my superiority in ability to appreciate the value of his moneys, I am a thief and—perhaps—a murderer. Perhaps—if you must needs seek exactitude from the dictionary. In my world everything is relative. If you ask me if I believe in honesty, I should ask you, in reply: Honesty of whom, about what? There is nothing so obvious, yet so generally unseen, as the complete relativity of everything. You say: this is a crime; I say that it all depends. If I had time, it would give me keen delight to

make these beautiful tenets of the fairer life plain to you, but—”

The speaker stopped suddenly, and the next instant the Sheriff heard what sounded like a faint moan. Then—

“Oh, my God!” came from the inner cell.

After that, utter stillness.

The Sheriff jumped up from his chair and swung round to the corridor. In his haste he leaned his rifle against the trellised wall of the veranda. Beyond through the barred door he could see the prisoner's body lying, a dull heap on the floor. He opened the door, swinging its heavy weight outward. “Shock—maybe; maybe heart failure,” he muttered. “Better so, like as not.” He advanced to the body, and touched it with his foot. About the touch of the thing there seemed to him something uncanny, something inelastic, something that spoke of dissolution. He stooped, in the fading light, to look at the face.

To see the better he turned, facing the open door. The dying streaks of sunlight shot across his sight and blinded him for a moment. Then, from somewhere beneath him, two hands gripped his throat, and he heard the note of a peculiarly extensive whistle.

And then consciousness passed from the Sheriff.

* * * * *

Outside there was the sound of some one gliding onto the veranda.

"That you, Billy?" hissed the inmate of the jail. "I'm—most uncommonly glad to see you. Quick, the gag, and the cord! The time's most unpleasantly short. This was the only way. No use my trying to evacuate the premises solus, in these clothes; the vigilant villagers know me too well. Help this gentleman off with his things, and on with mine, Billy. They don't know you when they see you, do they? No? That's good. In fifteen minutes, trains leave for East and West; until then I have a part to play. Do the Sheriff's things fit me pretty well? Well enough in this light, eh? Good! Why can't I cut and run right now? Fool! What would the Sheriff be doing away from the jail this time? I'm the Sheriff, Billy. Now—to the station! I—have an engagement."

Billy crept away into the bushes. He who had been prisoner stepped out onto the veranda, took up the rifle, and balanced himself on the tiptilted chair. He slouched the Sheriff's hat down over his forehead, and waited.

"Ah!"

The bull's-eye was gone from the target. The blue flag was withdrawn.

"Poor old soul!" said the watcher on the veranda. Then he added, "But he shouldn't have resisted!"

A fume of dust was in the air down the shadowy street.

"I opine," continued the soliloquizer, "that I am to be favored by visitors, Jake Farren, Jim Oyers, Marsh Quisenby, Alec Grant, *et al.*, as those wearisome legal methods phrase it. Well, I trust I may not, at this late date in my career, be accused of discourtesy."

Out of the cloud of dust came a cluster of human figures. In the dusk one could see that all of them carried shooting weapons, and that there were various efforts at facial disguise. These were ineffectual, for the most part; mere hangings of the hat too low over the brow, or handkerchiefs roughly twined about the lower face.

"It seems," mused the watcher before the jail, "that there are conventions, even in lynching. Even the merest debutants feel that an unclad face is in bad form."

The approaching group had something of solemnity about it. What sounds it gave out were but rumblings and mutterings below the breath. Their feet moved silently through the dust of the road.

The last man, the whipper-in, the rear guard, walked a few feet behind the others. From his shoulder something trailed, snake-like, in the dust, lashing up a wake of duncolored particles. In that light the trailing something, and the

opaque mist over it, had a suggestion of uncanniness.

As the group assembled before the jail, forming a sort of cordon before it, there came, from the veranda, a high-pitched wailing of an old-fashioned hymn.

"I guess Tod's kinder nervous," whispered one of the outer assembly, "never knew him to strike up 'Jesus will carry me through,' but what there was something on his mind."

Then came a loud call, from the middle of the group.

"Tod Minton!"

"Well?"

"Parson's dead."

"Ain't nobody any sorrier 'n me."

"You know what we're here for, Tod."

"I can guess pretty close."

"What you going to do, Tod?"

"Just my duty." The speaker fingered his rifle slightly, and there followed a metallic "tsk" that ricocheted from one to the other of the group outside.

"Going to shoot, Tod?"

"What's the use talkin, boys? You know me, and I know you. Ain't got one o' your setter dogs along has you, Jake? And I reckon Jim Oyers'll be out there, too. Wonder you'd not have give the job to Mattie, Jim. But what's the use wastin' time? You think you

got a duty, I reckon, and, as for me, I read my duty clear—and here's my gun!"

There was the growling of smothered talk. Then, again:

"He ain't worth it, Tod."

"I see my duty clear. None of my business who he is, or what he is. I'm Sheriff of this county. And I'll shoot, sure as my name's Tod Minton."

Outside there were hurried rumblings again. "There's only one thing," said the leader, in a whisper, to his comrades, "we got to shoot low. We don't want to hurt him."

There was the sound of a foot touching the veranda.

"I said I'd shoot," came from the trellis.

The next instant a Winchester spoke viciously. The porch climber reeled, and fell backward, and then came a volley that filled the whole world, it seemed, with smoke and noise.

The body of the guardian of the jail crashed heavily against the trellis-work, breaking it and scattering it. The figure lay on the grass, limp, with the smoke playing over it like a rising dew.

Over it and past it the attacking party stormed into the jail.

But one man, out of that party, lay dead in the road.

From the first shot to the utter desertion of the road and the veranda only seconds had elapsed.

The body that had lain limp under the veranda suddenly sprang stealthily to its feet. Then there was a swift move over to where the other body lay, stiff, silent. There was an exchange of hats and coats, and then he that had parleyed from the veranda plunged into the darkness that was between the jail and the railroad station.

* * * * *

Billy was anxiously pacing the platform a minute or so before the two trains were to start. The sound of the firing had come to him and he was filled with apprehension. Suddenly a tall figure, in garments that he did not recognize, brushed past him.

"You go east, Billy," said the figure; "I'll steer to the west. It'll be fifteen minutes before they have sense enough to wire, and I'll get out at the first station. Thank the dear Providence that watches us like babes, Billy! Hurry!"

Presently the station was empty; the trains had steamed away. Facing the west sat the tall individual who had but now been an inmate of the Clay County jail.

"Dear Heaven," he smiled to himself, "I wonder if the boards of any other stage have

ever felt the triumph of the art of mimicry so palpably as did that little veranda just now! To act—for one's life—ah—" He sank back into the cushions in reflections full of appreciation of himself—the keenest epicureanism in the world.

But in Clay Oak there are still men who will go to their graves swearing that the man who talked to them from the veranda of the jail, who killed Jim Oyers just before he himself was toppled over into the weeds was the Sheriff, Tod Minton—and no other. And yet the Sheriff had been found, gagged and bound, and half-strangled, on the floor of the inner cell.

In Clay Oak they no longer laugh at miracles.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH THERE IS A MEETING OF TWO EM-
PERORS, AND IN WHICH THE STARS AND
STRIPES ARE WAVED—AND SAVED

It was not long after the affair with the Sheriff of Clay that yearning, or necessity, or both, drove Lingo Dan to other climes. That the taciturn Billy accompanied him goes without saying. Spring found them in Southampton.

The night was bright and chill. From the roadway, lined with cheap lodging houses, Lingo Dan and Billy slouched through the gate that led to the docks and landing stages. Just inside the gate was a board bearing a chalked scrawl:

"Donau, Due 5 A. M."

Reaching the water, the two men sat down on a luggage-truck. Before them lay the steamer for Havre, seemingly all asleep. Occasionally, fiercely whiskered men walked up, looked at the lantern stuck within a transparency, that announced the steamer's destination, and walked over the gang-plank to the deck. From down the Solent came the hooting of

steamer whistles, and now and again some locomotive on the Southwestern screamed shrilly into the night.

A benevolently-faced dock-hand approached the two that sat there by the water's edge. He had only one leg, but he appeared vastly cheerful.

"A fine night, mates," was his greeting.

"Hallo, Springheel Jack, hallo! A fine night, did you say? My friend, I call no night in Southampton fine. Believe me, I consider this the jumping-off place of the world. Why, oh why, in the name of all things wonderful, do sane people live here?"

Springheel Jack swore and spate. "Southampton docks," he said, "is the finest docks in the world. New York's a toy-shop to it. I've been round the world and touched all its harbors twice, Mister Longlegs, and you just believe me: this very same Southampton's got the docks that makes 'em all look green."

Lingo Dan yawned wearily. "Well, well, perhaps you're right. I am quite willing to admit that I am no expert in dock measurements. But this much, my dear man, I trust you also will allow: Southampton is not the most exciting place in the world in which to spend a pleasant evening."

"Oh,—that!" The one-legged man looked at the other two with utter contempt. "It's no Paris, nor yet no Monte Carlo, if that's what

you mean. There's just two things to Southampton—there's the work, and there's the booze."

"Which, after all," smiled Lingo Dan, "is the wisest distribution of pain and pleasure that, in my philosophy, the world has yet found. But enough of Southampton. Has the *Donau* passed Hurst Castle yet?"

"No; and maybe they'll not signal her there at all. There may be fog. There's no telling. If we stay here she may not tie up till six in the morning, and if we go to get a bit of sleep, the luck is, she'll sneak up to the dock in between three and four, and them that's stayed out here all night will get the unloading of her. But I'm for bed, I am. One night of that a week's a bellyful for me; I had it yesternight." And therewith the dock-hand stumped toward the town.

Lingo Dan looked after him with a smile flickering about his mouth, as a moth flickers about a flame.

"But as for you and me, Billy," he said, presently, "we take no risks. When the *Donau* comes in, she finds us ready. I have thought it all out, Billy. It is, like all other things in the world, a speculation. But the stakes are small. Merely, in fact, a ducking. Moreover, there is the delightful element of surprise. It is like the dear old game of grab-bag that we were wont, as innocent little children, to play at church

festivals. Do you remember, Billy, do you remember? Dear, dead, days!" He sighed, and looked out over the shining, rustling water. Billy said no word. He was busy whittling at a plank with a clasp-knife.

"Billy!"

The answer was a grunt full of annoyance at being disturbed.

"Are you sure you quite recall our little plan? Your—h'm—preoccupation in—I doubt not—most happy mental gymnastics of your own, sometimes leads me to the fear that you might possibly forget such minor details as these immediate schemes of ours. Perhaps I wrong you? Say so, Billy, say so! No? Well then, to repeat: in carrying the mail-bags from ship to shore I manage to slip, and plunge, with my burden, into the water. As I do so, I rip the canvas with my knife, seize as many packages of letters as will be easily carried without suspicion, and transfer them quickly to you, who have, meanwhile, jumped in to rescue me. You must be quick, remember, lest someone be before you in the timely aid to the drowning. Don't let the fact that I can swim a mile to your yard keep you from your noble effort, Billy, and remember to be quick about hiding the letters. They'll only suspect *me*, you know, if the rip looks queer."

Billy nodded and grunted in what he doubtless meant to be a tone of acquiescence.

"Just think, Billy," his companion went on, "of the beautiful possibilities of the thing. There may be mere, commonplace coin; there may be cheques; there may be love letters; there may be,—ah, Billy, who can say what adventures there may not be in that swift instant that we take the liberty of intercepting the Royal Mail!" He began to whistle "Maryland, My Maryland." Then he continued, dreamily, almost whisperingly, "Have you noticed, Billy, that at home there is ache and anger against a European power? Have you read the newspapers of late? Tragedy sits waiting for our country. Our country! Billy, can you see, over there past Cowes, and past the Needles, and out over the gray sea, a fine, free, careless country?"

"Country nothing," interrupted Billy, rising, "that's the *Donau*."

"So it is, Billy, so it is."

And they went forward to meet the Royal Liner *Donau*.

* * * * *

About noon of the following day Lingo Dan and Billy were being rowed out to a trim, rakishly-curved steam yacht, that lay at anchor in the Solent.

"If there is one thing," Lingo Dan was observing, "that I have always wanted more than another, it is to own a yacht. It seems to be the supreme realization of the human wish to

have one's house one's castle. And now, Billy, now, my dream is to be realized." He let his hand droop into the water; the spray flung itself slightly over both himself and Billy. "I beg a thousand pardons, Billy," he declared, withdrawing his hand; "I meant not to spatter the new clothes. How, by the way, how do you think you look in them?"

"Rotten."

"Oh, no, not that, surely not that. A trifle eccentric, perhaps, but then—American millionaires are all accounted eccentric here. It fits most admirably—I mean the eccentricity, not the coat. For presently, you know, Billy, you will have to be that wonderful creature, an American millionaire. Your name will be Willie K. Elkhorn. The great Willie K. Elkhorn, who owns more ice than any man in the world, not excepting the Czar of Russia. But not until I give the word, Billy; not until then."

They reached the yacht in a very few minutes. After a word or two and a glance at a letter in Lingo Dan's hand, the master of the yacht showed them to his private cabin.

"Mighty glad to meet you, Captain—Captain Winters—thank you! Sit down, and let's get the business over quickly. Fact is, I've been waiting for you, knowing they'd call on me for the *Hawk* right away if they wanted her at all. Let me see the Secretary's letter again. Yes, that's right; I told him the last time I was

in Washington that any time the government wanted a yacht that could sail round anything afloat, they could have the *Hawk*."

"At your price, however?"

"Of course, Captain Winters; of course. I'm a good citizen, Captain Winters, but I can't very well offer the *Hawk* as a sacrifice on the altar of patriotism. Besides, that letter from the Secretary of the Navy authorizes you to pay me my price, doesn't it?"

"Yes; but the Secretary, Mr. Elkhorn, when he wrote me that letter, knew that I wouldn't pay a price I thought exorbitant."

"Well, nobody's going to be exorbitant; not Willie K. Elkhorn, anyway. Give me a government voucher, or order, or whatever you call it, for this"—he scrawled some figures on an envelope, and handed it to his visitor, "and I'll get out of the old boat today. I'm due in Paris this very minute, to tell you the truth."

The other read the figures, lifted his brows a trifle, looked at Elkhorn, and smiled.

"Nothing less?"

"Not a cent."

"Well, it's a hard bargain. You know we need the boat; and you know we need it now. However——" He sat down to the table and made out a promise to pay.

Elkhorn looked over his shoulder as he wrote. "Do you mind letting me see that letter, and those instructions, again. It's a large

amount ; it's best to be quite certain—you'll not take it in offense." He ran his eyes over the documents that the other handed him. "Seems explicit enough, doesn't it. 'Purchase at once the *Hawk*, W. K. Elkhorn's yacht, now in the Solent. He has expressed his willingness to sell when called upon. Take full charge of her yourself, retaining, if possible, the crew now on board, so as to lose no time, and report at the first possible moment at Fortress Monroe.' H'm, h'm, h'm. 'Your own signature, on enclosed blank, will be our guarantee to Mr. Elkhorn. If necessary, show him this letter.' H'm, h'm, h'm. Yes, that's the Secretary's signature all right. And you're Captain Cornelius Winters, and I'm W. K. Elkhorn, and here's the *Hawk*; and so I guess we'll have all settled in about thirty seconds. I think there'll be no difficulty about keeping the crew I have on board. They're all men from the New England coast, and they're just aching for a fight. I'll call my sailing-master."

He put his hand to a button beside him. A stout man in blue came to the door.

"Smalley," said Elkhorn, "this is Captain Cornelius Winters, of the U. S. Navy, from this time on in complete command of this yacht. You will take all your orders from him."

The sailing-master smiled hugely. "Is it trouble?" he asked.

"Trouble?" echoed Elkhorn; "well, you just bet there's trouble. And it can't be long before it comes to a head. You're still in neutral waters, Winters, but you can't get out of 'em too soon. If you've any stores to get, or armament, you'd better hurry. As for me, I'm off." He put on his hat, and made for the doorway. Just as he reached it, he turned about and said: "I leave the *Hawk* just as she is, fittings, furnishings, and all. You get her inside and outside. Do as you damn please with her. Fight the enemy, run her on a reef, lose her,—I don't care. Bye-bye, Smalley! Good fighting to you, Winters!"

And he was gone. The same boat that had brought Lingo Dan and Billy to the *Hawk* took W. K. Elkhorn back to Southampton.

When the millionaire had left the cabin the new owner sat staring at the wall. "I own a yacht," he murmured; "I own a yacht. Dream of my youth, regret of my early manhood. The sudden realization almost stuns me. Is it real, I wonder, is it real?" Suddenly he became aware of Smalley still standing in the doorway. "Mr. Smalley," he said, turning to face that person, "with your navigation of the *Hawk* I will not interfere at all, do you understand. I will merely give you such orders as are necessary—the fewer the better. My own orders are sealed—to a certain extent. But before everything, have the *Hawk's* white and

blue changed to gray; and have her put in condition to take the rapid-fire guns that she's to carry. At once, Mr. Smalley, at once. That's all."

As the blue figure disappeared up the companionway, Lingo Dan suppressed a burst of chuckling. "Too bad," he said to himself, "too bad! Poor Billy freezing up on deck all this time. Billy, alias Willie K. Elkhorn—if necessary. And I—oh marvelous jugglery of chance!—I, Lingo Dan, performing the rites of Captain Cornelius Winters, U. S. N.!" He got up and began to probe the furnishings of the cabin. As one of the little knobs turned at his touch, he gave an exclamation. "A sideboard," he said, "a most delightful sideboard! Champagne, iced!" He smacked his lips, and put a bottle and two glasses on the table.

Then he went to call Billy.

* * * * *

"Can you make her out, Smalley?" Lingo Dan was trying in vain to pierce with his own unaided eyes the miles of gray sea-haze that lay between the *Hawk* and the vessel that had just been sighted.

"Not altogether, sir; but, if I'm not much mistaken, it's a boat of our own sort. There's a nasty mist on the water." He kept the glass to his eye in silence for some little time. "I think I see her now. It's—yes, by ginger, it is! I know her; we were in the same parade with

her a few years ago. It's the *Brandenburg*."

"The *Brandenburg*?" Lingo Dan whistled. A smile crept along his lips. "Head for her, Smalley," he said. Then he went over to where Billy was sitting, gazing disconsolately at the froth and swirl that danced above the screws.

"Billy, we have sighted the *Brandenburg*. Think of it, Billy! The *Brandenburg*! The imperial *Brandenburg*! Ah, Billy, see how the dictates of an ever watchful Providence ordain that the odds be even. In our time, Billy, have we not launched our mightiest curses upon those modern engines of thought that men call newspapers? Ah, countless times. Well, here, at last, comes the reversal; today, oh William, we have cause to offer hearty thanks to the vigilance of newspapers, of correspondents. Incidentally, Billy, I take some small share of praise to myself; had I not been so faithful to perusal of the world's doings, I would not have known, weeks ago, when we left Southampton, that the *Brandenburg* was likely to be in these waters. And now, Billy, there she comes; see, Billy, how majestically she skims along! Majestically, I say, majestically. In more ways than one, since she has the Emperor aboard." He put his hand on Billy's shoulder so that the other winced away from the grip and faced him. "Presently, Billy, you will have to try to seem more amiable than this. Your great moment is approaching; you will have to be the

American millionaire, Billy, to the very flourish in the dot upon the I. An execrable coat, that of yours; a most infelicitous garment! But—on the other hand, most splendidly in keeping with the general eccentricity upon which the great goddess, Nature, foreseeing your enmilioned destiny, has fashioned you.” He turned to leave; then he flung a warning back over his shoulder, in a tone that had no echo of flippancy in it: “Keep sober, Billy, as you value our lives!”

He walked back toward Smalley’s post on the bridge. His face, as he strode over the *Hawk’s* deck, glowed with the delight he took in contemplation of his yacht’s grim war-visage. This was a very different *Hawk* to the one that had left Southampton a few weeks ago. Grim in her slate apparel, grim with her Nordenfeldts and Gatlings, grim with the mystery of her purpose—it was hard for Smalley and the crew to remember that this was the same *Hawk* that Willie K. Elkhorn had for years been wont to use in his almost aimless junketings in and out of all the pleasure-tapping ports of both hemispheres. Yet it could not be said that they frowned at the change; rather, they welcomed it. They wondered, perhaps, at the order that brought the Stars and Stripes down, and sent no bunting of any sort up in its place. But, after all, if that was what Captain Winters wished, their part was

merely to obey. So they worked, humming and whistling, waiting eagerly for any decisive activity.

"You are sure it's the *Brandenburg*?"

Smalley turned at the question. "I'll stake my buttons on it," he said.

"Very well. Go as close as you can without making them nervous; have all our men keep below, and run up signals of distress."

Presently a small boat was sent down the side of the *Brandenburg*, and came toward the *Hawk*.

Captain Winters was ready for the newcomers. Excessive courtesy met them above decks; below decks the spluttering, splendidly-uniformed strangers found themselves suddenly surrounded, asked for their weapons, pinioned. There was much thunderous, rumbling profanity.

Captain Winters spoke in a tongue that the crew of the *Hawk* knew little about. He addressed the newcomers.

"*Fluchen*," he declared, "*ist unnuetz.*" Then a terrific babble came at him from all the prisoners at once. But he waved them away into silence. "I merely wished to convey to you," he went on, "the salient fact that I understand everything you say. Just as most of you now understand what I say. Now listen. You are in my power at this moment. I can keep you

prisoned here and set steam for the Cannibal Island with you if I choose. Your people on the *Brandenburg* will never know until it is too late; the mist grows thicker between us every instant. If you want your lives, this is what you must do. You must send your boat back to the *Brandenburg* with such a message as will ensure His Majesty's visit to this room that now has the great honor of harboring you. I do not care how the message reads; you may tell of having found a derelict, or of a dying stranger calling on a last sight of his Emperor,—I care not at all. Only this much, remember: treachery will be a painful experiment. The moment I scent tricks I shall blow His Majesty and his yacht to a throne that is vastly older than the divine right of kings. Do you understand me?"

The prisoners, with their wrists chafing against handcuffs, nodded.

"Remember, I must have your word, each one of you. It is either that, or,—a little trip for you, gentlemen, into as much of the Unknown as I may choose for you." The face of Captain Winters relaxed into a most kindly, smiling expression. "If it will relieve your fears at all, gentlemen, let me assure you that the thing is but a whim, a jest. The fact is, the owner of this yacht, Mr. W. K. Elkhorn, of the United States, has made up his mind to have your imperial master to dinner. He knows

the impossibility of the thing by ordinary methods. Hence these desperate tricks of mine. Do you not see? I, gentlemen, I myself, am as much amused as I begin to see you are. In confidence, to you, I admit the apparent shamelessness of such social ambition; but, at the same time, gentlemen, I find the thing too humorous not to follow it with zest. And so, I beg, do you do also. A harmless, curious, whim—that is all. Have I your words, upon your honor?"

By this time the strangers were between frowning and laughing. The magnitude of this folly was throwing them off their balance. "*Diese verrueckten Amerikaner!*" was the only voice that one of them found. Their minds hurried over the possibilities, the chances for their own escape, the desperate extremities of folly in the man before them, the hazard of the Emperor's tragic wrath, the chances of his ultimate safety in this insane ship. But there seemed no way out of compliance with Captain Winters' commands. So they consented.

The rowboat left the *Hawk*, and was swallowed up in the mist. Captain Winters was talking rapidly and earnestly with Smalley. After the sound of the oars was dead in the gray veil, there was nothing alive but the voice of the *Hawk* chafing in the swell. It seemed, almost, as if the boat's crew was gone forever, as if behind that veil of mist there was nothing,

no Emperor, no *Brandenburg*. But Captain Winters smiled. He had seen the message that had been sent from the prisoned officers; he had chuckled at every word of it; he had even passed a jest with the writer of it.

"Give them a sign of life, Smalley."

The *Hawk's* fog whistle called its way into the mist. For answer, there came the splash of oars, and the rowboat creeping, a shapeless shadow in black, out of the gray.

A young man, keen eyed, of military bearing, strode quickly up the ladder to the deck of the *Hawk*. It was the first time in his life that he had come so far without receiving a salute. He frowned, and his eyes gleamed.

The moment he touched deck there was a clang behind him, and he heard a voice, in English, giving the order:

"Full speed ahead, Smalley; you know where to."

Whereupon the *Hawk* turned her nose away from where the *Brandenburg* had last been seen and went cutting and slashing through the North Sea at the rate of twenty-two knots an hour.

"No, Smalley, never mind the fog," went on the voice; "we've got an Emperor aboard; Would any fog assail the anointed of the Lord? Full speed ahead. We have an Emperor aboard!"

The Emperor sprang back to the taffrail, his lips opened for a mighty shout, and then suddenly his sacred arms felt the restraining might of stronger arms, and a hand went to his mouth. Before his breath and his passionate struggling left him the *Hawk* was miles away from its late resting-place. "I regret," said Captain Winters, "the necessity for this violence against Your Majesty's person, but—may I explain?" He waved his hand toward the companionway of the dining-saloon.

The Emperor looked at the man before him, at the impassive crew of aliens about him; his hands clenched convulsively. He was white in his rage. "My officers?" he asked at last.

"Are safe," said Captain Winters. "Will you lead the way?"

Involuntarily the Emperor's eyes widened a little as he stepped into the dining-room. A table was set for three. There was such silver as the *Brandenburg* could not equal, such splendor of decoration and furnishing as the imperial yacht had never dreamed of.

"Your Majesty, I hope, has not yet dined?"

"Enough, enough! What is this insult? Oh!—there shall be blood for this; blood, I tell you; Europe shall run with blood."

"Europe?" Captain Winters smiled a little. "How unfair! Why Europe? Poor Europe! It must be sad to be a European. Come, come, Your Majesty forgets—Your Majesty!

Besides, I have only to touch a button, here, in the wainscot, and our dinner can be made a bread and water solitude. Let me explain. The yacht that now shelters you is the property of Willie K. Elkhorn, who does himself the honor to ask you to dinner. He takes unusual means to assure your presence; that is all."

"A fool! A lunatic! How does he dare?"

"He is an American."

The Emperor stared.

"Has it ever occurred to Your Majesty that, far over seas, there is a nation that has, h'm, to use an expression of Mr. Elkhorn's, emperors to burn. Do you know that there is a country yonder where emperors are so thick that one passes them daily on the street. They command more millions than you; they have greater luxuries; they have more than your command over pleasure, and none of your dangers, none of your responsibilities. They are not shackled. They can outbid you in the markets of the world. You order the finest palace car in the world; they can order ten better ones. You order the invasion of a continent; they can buy that continent's safety before your order is cold. And yet,—and yet you talk of the divine right of kings! Your Majesty, there is only one country that has divine rights, and that is the country where all are kings!"

The Emperor stirred nervously.

"I am sorry I torture Your Majesty with my diffuseness. But it is only right that I seek to show justification for our actions. Here is the case: two emperors sailing the same sea; strangers, yet both emperors. Old, foolish superstitions of etiquette forbid these two great equals becoming acquainted as man to man. So one of these two emperors spurns the stale conventions of propriety, and makes a bold bid for fellowship. He invites you to dinner. He is an American emperor; you are a European emperor. Call it an adventure, a folly,—call it what you please; but it is only the expression of W. K. Elkhorn's passionate desire to have your sacred legs under his democratic mahogany. Will Your Majesty be pleased to dine?"

The Emperor was still frowning.

"Are you the man?" he asked, abruptly.

"I? Your Majesty is pleased to flatter me. I? No, no; not I. I am no emperor. My very loquacity should show you that. It is the province of emperors to be brief; I—I am the opposite. No; I am merely the humble representative, the companion, the spokesman."

"Are you secretary or valet?"

A flush came over Lingo Dan's face. Then he remembered his Captain Winters' pose, and curbed himself.

"Something of each, perhaps. But—with more power than either. In fact, as concerns the present, Your Majesty will be good enough

to remember that I am the—the representative of the host. Let me be plain; you may hunger, or you may dine. Your life, on this yacht, is not worth a *kreutzer*. Will you be pleased to dine?"

"I will have blood for it."

"Will Your Majesty be pleased to dine?"

"Such insolence! And to a prince!"

Lingo Dan put out his right arm, to where a disk of white showed in the rosewood wainscot.

"If I touch this button," he said, "and give the order, that sacred person of yours may be compelled to suffer in solitude and abstinence tonight. It seems you will not understand. We invite you in good faith, in some attempt at cheery fellowship; but—if you choose to cut up rough, we, too, can take that cue. Do you not realize that you are powerless?"

"Fool! Do you forget the telegraph, the—?"

"I forget nothing. True, there is the telegraph. What you mean is that in a few hours or so your other officers on the *Brandenburg* will grow anxious, then frantic. They will run into the nearest port and wire their wonderful news broadcast, to all the secret agents of your government. The ports of Europe will be in wait for this yacht; there will be a sword in the hand of every harbor-master this side of Sandy Hook. But I also remember this: the

same reason that will keep your government from publishing your absence to the world openly will prevent your own actions along that line. Consider the ridiculous possibilities of the thing! If I judge Your Majesty aright, publicity of this episode would torture you far more than the thing itself. Think of all the comic papers in Europe picturing your involuntary imprisonment on the yacht of an American millionaire! Think of the chorus of laughter in the world! Above all, think of the danger in your own government. Is your position so secure that you can afford the rumor of your sudden incapacity? I think not. If you refuse the suggestions that we wish to put to you—quite in the way of dinner conversation, you will understand—we have it in our power to take you over seas for an absence of, oh, well, at least a month. Are your affairs at home so safe they can suffer your evanishment so long?"

No answer came from the sullen Emperor.

"Your Majesty, I take it, will now be pleased to dine?"

"I will have blood," was still the answer.

"Not blood, but Burgundy, Your Majesty, we offer you. A finer wine, I wager, than the imperial cellars hold. Your Majesty!" The last two words rang out with sudden sharpness.

"I hear you."

"Your Majesty, the dinner grows cold. An American emperor waits for no man. Will you be pleased to dine, or——"

Before the sentence came to end a shock and a following shiver came to the boat. In the dining-room the flowers spilled their petals over the white cloth, and the glasses clanged together with a bell-like note. Lingo Dan's finger covered the white disk in the wall for a second.

"Call Smalley," he said.

They waited in silence until the sailing-master came.

"Anything wrong, Smalley?"

The man's face had a sort of horror in it. "We cut down a fishing-smack," he said.

"Any damage?"

"We could see nothing, sir: I fear they're all gone down. I've slowed her up and——"

"Slowed! I take it we're not damaged at all! Full speed ahead, Smalley, full speed ahead."

"But there might be some of them floating on wreckage, so I thought——"

"Sorry, Smalley, but you must not think tonight. Full speed ahead! We are on business of the—Emperor's."

After Smalley had gone and the regular beat of the screws could be heard again, Lingo Dan turned for a glance at his guest. The Emperor's face was white, his eyes had the look of a man who is hunted to a corner. The sudden

realization of the ruthlessness of his captor had come to him out of those words with Smalley.

"Yes, I will dine," he said, with weariness in his voice.

"Ah, you will see, Your Majesty, how highly we value the honor."

Now that his point was won, there was nothing more suave, more gentle, more apparently obsequious than the manner of Lingo Dan to his guest. "You must forget everything, save that we are dining in good fellowship. Indeed, indeed! you must think only that you are bestowing upon us a great favor." He touched the electric bell again. "And now to introduce to Your Majesty the owner of the boat, and for the time, your host."

There came into the room the squat, ungainly figure of Billy. His hair was short as the bristles on a boar, and it stood up almost as grimly. His face was uncannily clean; the soap had made the fiery complexion glow with an added lustre. He slouched in, with one shoulder higher than the other; the head held low, with the forehead poised like the horns of an angry bull. When Lingo Dan's smooth sentence of introduction came, this version of Willie K. Elkhorn, American millionaire, merely jerked his head the faintest bit, flashed his eyes for a second or so over the Emperor's resplendent uniform, and dropped into the chair nearest him.

And then began a wonderful dinner. There have been curious companions at dinner before in the world, but surely there have been few occasions like this one. Here sat the Emperor of one of the great Powers, treating as an equal two nameless vagabonds, two conscienceless adventurers, the one a mere brutish ruffian, the other an ingenious trifler with tragedies, a cunning artificer of plans to no good purpose, a man who might have been anything, and had chosen to be nothing. And yet the Emperor was bound, and the vagabonds were free. A curious dinner, surely.

They were come to the entree before anything more than perfunctory phrases passed. Then Lingo Dan spoke:

“Mr. Elkhorn, Your Majesty, it may astonish you to learn, is a gentleman whose fame is a household word with sixty million people. More people stand in awe of him than of any private person in the world. And why? Because, Your Majesty, he controls a human comfort—he is King of Ice. Let Mr. Elkhorn say the word, and there will be no ice from one end of your dominion to the other. What would you say to that, Your Majesty, when fevers came, or tepid bottles of the wine you choose to call mere *Schaumwein*, or——”

The Emperor lifted his brows and almost smiled.

"It is the age of the material," he admitted.

"You are right, Your Majesty; it sometimes seems so. And yet, I confess, in your case your constant war against the material has made us admire you. Mr. Elkhorn, Your Majesty, is quite a devotee of art. The famous Meissonier that kings have bid for hangs in his palace on the Sound, and the finest thing that Rodin ever did awaits you in his hallway. Like all men of great mental force, he seeks relaxation from the cares of business in devotion to art. And long ago he came to consider you one of the greatest artists in the world. Your poetry, your painting, your plays, your speeches, your splendid taste for pageantry—all these have held him your admirer for many years. And now, you see, being so near, and yet, through the barrier of convention, so hopelessly far, he simply could not, could not resist an effort to come face to face with you, to voice to you his earnest worship of your talents and your greatness,—your greatness as an artist rather than as emperor."

The adroitness of the flattery pierced the armor of the Emperor's scorn. What defiance of his power as emperor had not been able to achieve this subtle fawning before him as a dilettante succeeded in. He became, in a trice, the man; the emperor was gone.

"I drink," he said, with a lift of his glass, "to Mr. Elkhorn."

On solemn smiles the three glasses were emptied.

"It is something I shall always remember," said the pseudo Captain Winters, "this of Your Majesty and the great Mr. Elkhorn touching glasses. It may, who knows, mean more than the mere fellowship of man to man,—it may foreshadow the close comradeship of nations."

The Emperor made no direct reply. His eyes were wandering about the splendor of the cabin. "A beautiful room," he said, "a beautiful boat. Has America many such?"

"Scores upon scores. If Mr. Elkhorn cared to boast, he could tell you of this vessel's speed, of her guns——"

"Her guns?"

"Why, yes, her guns. You see, Your Majesty, America expects every millionaire to do his duty. Mr. Elkhorn is doing his; he is turning his yacht over to the American government for—anything that may turn up. Indeed, she is at this moment bound for our coast, and——"

"But not before touching somewhere?"

"Oh, no, Your Majesty, not before. We merely wished the delight of a dinner with the greatest artist of the time——" he bowed toward the Emperor—"and then, we are at Your Majesty's commands."

"It is a strange experience," mused the Emperor aloud. His face now wore a smile, now

a puzzled look. Presently, as the wine stirred him, the frowns and furrows left his face, and the smile seemed to feel more at home about his lips. Surely this was the most curious flattery to which he had yet been subjected, to be kidnapped that he might grace a table as diner! An odd phase of fame, but yet fame.

It was midnight, and the coffee was low in the cups, when Lingo Dan asked, obsequiously,

"The Hook of Holland, at dawn, Your Majesty, will that be convenient for you?"

The Emperor nodded briefly.

"And before you leave us, Your Majesty, there is another favor we would ask. A little thing, and yet—. Between ourselves and Spain there is some chance of war. If war there be, the far East would see some of it. The harbor of Manila, for instance. Your Majesty has warships in that harbor. Were they to join with Spain, it would make heavy odds against our side. Will you cement the many pleasant things you have said about our land by vowing to stay neutral?"

"Spain is my friend." The Emperor's frown returned to his face.

"Yet you have dined with us."

"I did not ask to."

"True. We are the beggars; we have begged your presence, as we beg your promise of neutrality."

"Why should I promise—to a man who is no ambassador, nothing but a private individual?"

"Very well. Your Majesty shall see America. It is a pleasant place,—but it is a week away."

The Emperor glared across the table. "A trap," he muttered, "a trap."

"You have only to sign a paper, Your Majesty, promising Hands Off. Your word—the word of an Emperor—shall suffice. If not,—ten days at sea with an Emperor, that is what it means to Mr. Elkhorn and myself; it would, looked at from my selfish side, be a boon from you if you refused to sign. Still,—if you care to return to the *Brandenburg*—"

"You threaten me?"

The pseudo captain passed the wine. "No; I implore. See, I do not ask you to take arms with us; I only ask your neutrality."

They sat in silence for a few moments. The eyes of Billy glistened sleepily. Now and again they closed. He came to with sudden jerks, not unconnected with the fact that Lingo Dan had long and active legs. The fume of cigar smoke and fruit and hot coffee was thick in the room. As the moments passed, Lingo Dan took out a sheet of paper from a pocket book, penciled on it hurriedly, erased a little, and then folded the paper, waiting for the Emperor.

At last the guest spoke. "I agree," he said.

"I knew you would," said Lingo Dan, "have you not broken bread with us. Surely an Emperor, like an Arab, would not refuse a favor after breaking bread."

He rang for pen and ink. Then from his notes he dictated a curt line or two, that the Emperor wrote down, and signed.

"And now," said the acting host, "our pleasant dinner comes to an end. It is one that I shall treasure as the greatest repast of my life. While my conscience rebukes me for the manner in which we engaged your Majesty's presence on board, I am consoled by the thought that the dinner was excellent, and the wines not unfit for an Emperor. We have merely used a few hours of your Majesty's time, and we have done the cause of our country a trifling good turn, yet we are the richer by having seen and talked to the keenest artist of the time. Oh, by the way, your Majesty, will you send word to your officers—dining, I fancy, elsewhere in this good boat—to leave with you at the Hook? Will you send them a message telling them your stay with us was just a mere imperial whim? Then all will be ready for your leaving us."

And so, when daybreak came, an Emperor stepped aboard a small boat, waved his hand once to two figures on the deck of the *Haruk*, and had his men pull to the shore.

As the *Hawk* went skimming across the shining, waveless waters, Lingo Dan turned his eye up to the bare poles.

"Run up the Stars and Stripes!" he called to Smalley.

Then, as the flag flew out behind the yacht, he looked at Billy with a smile.

"We've served our country, Billy, served our country. It's not everybody that does that—for nothing."

* * * * *

Some weeks later, when the United States generally were somewhat concerned as to whether a certain European Power would interfere in the naval encounters near Manila, the neighborhood of Larchmont, on Long Island Sound, was thrown into excitement by the fact that the private yacht of Willie K. Elkhorn had anchored there one night, and that a certain Captain Winters, with a companion, according to the statement of Sailing-master Smalley, had never since been heard of. But over in a shaded meadow, near the New Haven track, two men lay listening to the birds and insects. And these were the only two men in America who knew why there would be no interference with America in the Far East.

"I shouldn't wonder, Billy," one of these two men remarked, after he had laughed aloud

at his silent thoughts, "if it was decidedly unhealthy for the real Willie K. Elkhorn when next he goes to Europe." Then he laughed again. "And as for Captain Winters—But I'll bet he wouldn't have had the fun with that yacht that we did, to say nothing of—h'm, saving the country. Would he, Billy?"

"Not by a damned sight," was the answer.

CHAPTER V

TELLING OF SOME RIFLE BULLETS AND THE INVENTION OF A SOMEWHAT SPLENDID LIE

Two men lay face downward in the rank underbrush. At intervals their cheeks leaned over rifle-barrels, and the hot air rang with shots, while their shoulders ached so that one of the men grumbled audibly. From the slopes facing them came a constant crackling, followed by a malignant hissing note that swayed and cut through the leaves about them.

One of the men suddenly put his face down into the grass and flung his rifle down. "It's too hot," he said.

The other turned a trifle and surveyed his companion. "Billy," he declared, "your concise manner of expressing the truth is worth much poetry. You are right—the heat is unspeakably atrocious. And yet—" he put down his rifle, and rested his head on one hand—"and yet, Billy, in the matter of poetry, do you know that if I were a poet I could find a subject in this very weird whistling that now—

well, that makes these quarters of ours so unpleasantly unsafe. I should call it 'The Song of the Mauser.' I should think it might appeal to Kipling. Listen, Billy!"

The crackling from the yonder slopes and the whistling over the heads of these two came almost simultaneously.

"Just like the peewits moaning over their nests," said the longer of the two men. "Billy, am I right in thinking you uncomfortable?"

"Oh," growled Billy, "shut up!"

"Strange, Billy, that you should use that phrase. Shut up! Does it never occur to you the while we are—ahem—exposing our bodies for the sake of fair Cuba and the Stars and Stripes, that if kind fate had not given me the happy inspiration of making for this self-same corner of God's great sun-kissed foot-stool we should at this moment be both secure, and snug, and cribbed, and cabin'd, and confined, and all the rest of it, in jail? Have you forgotten those little matters of the venerable parson, the conscientious sheriff, the emperor, the —"

A bullet from the slopes cut a slice out of Billy's hat. Billy took up his rifle with a vicious snort, and flung his retort of lead at the enemy. The powder from his clumsy Springfield draped the couple with a veil of smoke that made an excellent target for the Spaniards. Bullets began cutting the leaves and

stalks as if some unseen scythe were at work. Billy growled louder.

"Oh, Dan!"

"Well?"

"I'd rather be in jail."

For a time there was silence between them. The sun scorched them, and the bullets sang their sinister songs to them. Then the tall man's soft, musically modulated voice began, as if it were a monologue.

"Dear Billy, you have, I grieve to observe, but little appreciation of the good and beautiful. Does no notion of the beauty of our present position strike you? Think of it, my dear Billy! We, of whose persons the United States government is so enamored that it has sent special requisitions after us—offering, indeed, quite substantial rewards for the person fortunate enough to find us—we, I say, to escape the public honors that the authorities no doubt intend to bestow upon us, have taken to the disguise of the volunteer army. We are fighting for the flag. We are fighting for Cuban freedom. We are heroes. We are fighting the nation that blew up the Maine. We are fighting—"

"Rats!" Billy almost spat the word onto the grass. "I'm fighting for the loot."

Dan raised himself a trifle to catch Billy's eye. "Billy, you astound me. Loot? Loot? I don't remember the word's meaning. Fame,

honor, revenge; I know that the world expects a soldier to be inspired by these things. But loot!" He smiled at Billy's rumblings. Then he added, even more softly than before, as if the grass or some Spanish bullet might overhear, "Incidentally, Billy, you will kindly remember that in the matter of loot you will keep your hands off until I—" He stopped suddenly, gripped his rifle to him, and hissed under his breath:

"A crazy man—or a coward! Look, coming this way!"

Coming towards them, headlong over the clear space to their right, was a figure in blue and buff. To cross that open ground was almost certain death. To the Spaniards on the slopes before them the man must be cut out clearly as a silhouette. From where the man was coming another infantry regiment was fighting its way up the slopes.

The man must have left those ranks. Dan and Billy watched silently. The man plunged headlong towards them.

"It's a coward," said Dan, presently. "I can see his face. It's got stage-fright written over it."

The runner dropped, in a flash, to the grass. One of the singing bullets had found him. He lay in the sun-glare, a mere dark spot on the clearing.

Over on the right the regiment that this coward had fled from was being beaten back. It moved gradually further to the right flank of the attacking line. In the regiment to which Dan and Billy belonged came the command for deploying more to the left. The ground on both sides of the clearing was to be deserted.

Warily, painfully, the men crawled through the underbrush, edging away from the clearing. Only Dan and Billy had not yet joined in the regiment's change of base. Dan's eyes were still fixed on that dark spot that lay out there in the open.

Billy growled with impatience. "Coming?" he said, and turned to rejoin the regiment.

But Dan seized him by the shoulder. "Look; look out there!" The spot of darkness on the sunlight open was moving, was crawling. The man tried to rise; he fell back again, with his legs crumpled under him. Dan looked at Billy. A buzzard circled high above them. A faint shudder went through Dan as he swept his keen eyes from the spot in the clearing to the spot in the sky.

"Come, Billy!" said Dan, and without another word the two flashed out into the open. The bullets thickened all about them, but they never stopped until they had reached the man who was wanted by death and the buzzards.

Back in their regiment a cheer broke out. Dan and Billy were carrying the man across

the clearing into the protection of the thickets. Some miracle seemed to keep the Spanish bullets away from them, or else the sheer splendid folly of the thing diverted the aim of the enemy.

The man whose mortally wounded body these two had brought into such shelter as was possible was, after all, little more than a boy. A white face, with the outlines fine and delicate, the stamp of race plain on its front. The regimental surgeon shook his head over the boy's closed eyes. "You got him decent burial, that's about all," he said to Dan.

Dan smiled sweetly. "My dear doctor," he replied, and at the man's enunciation the surgeon gave a start and squinted with surprise, "my reward is not so much the boy's actual salvation as the exquisiteness of my own sensations." The surgeon was for asking him who he was, when other wounded claimed his attention.

The wounded boy's head was resting in Dan's lap. Presently his eyes opened. The lips shivered like leaves stirring in the faintest of breezes. Finally sound came.

"My name—my name." Then the lips worked for a few seconds in mere struggles for breath. "Look—my right breast." Dan put his hand into the boy's shirt, and brought out a smaller leather case.

"Yes. Open it." Dan took from the case a card. He read the name, and nodded his head.

"Don't let—the others know." The boy tried to smile.

"You—I can see—you know. I don't care, but—don't let the others know. Bury me—here. And—listen. My father—you must tell my father—that I died—in battle."

Something misty came into Dan's eyes. He took the limp hand of the dying, gasping youngster. All his wonted elaborateness of phrase went from him. "All right, old man," he said, cheerily, "I'll tell him. I'll find him. Never fear, I'll tell him."

"He—he was a soldier. He—hates a—a coward."

The dying coward was quiet for a moment or so. Then his eyes turned to Dan with the sudden flame that comes before the snuffing out of all light.

"What's your—name?" said the fading voice.

"My name?" A long, thin hand went softly over the boy's forehead. "I'm called Lingo Dan." Again there was silence, and then Dan spoke again. "And this—this is Billy." He nodded to the bulky, squat figure of his companion.

The boy looked from one to the other. "Good-by—Dan. Good-by, Billy!"

The eyes closed slowly, as if their owner were sinking into a doze. Presently Dan put his ear to the boy's lips. Then he lifted a finger, and beckoned to Billy to take the dead man's head and place it flat to earth.

Several months afterward, when there was left of the Spanish-American war nothing but the wrangling over the proctocol in Paris, two men, in attire distinctly unfashionable, went up the steps of a house in the most fashionable part of Fifth avenue. The footman who opened the door looked at them suspiciously. But something on the card that the taller of the two presented made him hurry to his master in a manner that was almost undignified.

In the vast hallway Dan and Billy surveyed their surroundings with the eyes of connoisseurs.

"Silver," remarked Dan, "to the tune of several hundreds. A most reckless, a most indecent exposure. The china is also rare. Most of it, moreover, is easily portable. A feast for the eye. And for the pocket—"

A door far down the corridor opened, and a tall, white-haired man in black came eagerly towards them. Instinctively he turned to Dan.

"Come in, come in," he said, putting a hand on a shoulder of each, and almost pushing them into his study. The room was barely furnished. Books hid the walls except where pictures hung; these latter were all battle scenes.

"Of course," said the old man, "I knew it would have to come. I knew he must be dead. And yet I kept on hoping. One will keep on hoping, you know, so long after hope itself is dead. But there were so many curious circumstances—" He stopped quickly, and changed his tone. "You saw him die?"

The other two nodded.

Confidence came into this father's face once more. "There were so many curious circumstances. The boy thought himself in disgrace. He went away, foolishly, boy-like, to wipe out what he called a stain. Sometimes I used to try to fancy he would still come back; that he was merely plucking up courage to face the world, to face society, to face me. Just as if—" he paused and looked out of the window—"just as if I would not have taken him at any risk." He began to fumble with the little leather case that Dan silently handed him. Suddenly he sprang to his feet, and began to pace the room. Then he shook his head like an angry lion. "Bah!" he said, "I'm weak. I get old." He sat down again. "Tell me how he died. With a brave front, of course. Tell me; I can listen. He comes of a race of soldiers. We all die fighting." He smiled, and signaled to Dan to proceed.

Dan cleared his throat a little. Billy scraped an awkward foot heavily over the thick carpet.

"He died," began Dan, "with his face to the foe. His death was a splendid folly. A comrade was wounded, lying in a clearing, target for all of Spain's bullets. Your son, sir, sprang out into the open, picked up the wounded man, brought him into the lines again, and then fell. He was shot in no less than three places. I observed to Billy, I may remark—have I introduced Billy to you?—at the time of your son's magnificent bravado, that so fearless a son must surely have had a fearless father. That, of course," he dropped his voice a little, "was before I knew." He bowed toward the old man.

The old man was on his feet again, striding about the room nervously. "You saw him die, you saw him die. I wish I had been there. It atones for everything, does a death like that. Oh, yes, there was much to atone for, much. But—a death like that! Good boy, good boy!" He went to the window and looked across the avenue, and at the passing strollers. "Did he speak—before the end?"

"He was in my arms. He wanted me to tell you. I promised." Dan did not look into the old man's eyes. He was looking at Billy, whose eyes were roaming about the walls, computing the value of the hangings.

"He died in your arms?" The old man's glance went suddenly up and down, through

and through his two visitors. "You have been mustered out? Yes. Have you employment, or profession?"

Dan's smile curled about his mouth corners. "We have," he said, "our profession."

The rich man, thinking of his son and his millions, hesitated. Something in this tall man's manner spoke the gentleman, the man to whom it was impossible to offer alms, to tender rewards. "For the man in whose arms my son died, the man who tells me of the splendor of my son's death," he said finally, "there is nothing in this world that I would not do. I want you to remember that. Shall I hope, as between gentlemen, that if there is ever anything in my power you will let me know?"

Dan looked at the master of the house with a strange gaze. "Some day—perhaps. Who knows? But for the present I have merely done my duty. My name? The name I wear is Lingo Dan. It was the name your son knew me by. Your son—who died in battle." He got up to go, and signed to Billy. "I know that you wish to be alone. But you must think only of this—your son died in the forefront of the fight, with his face to the foe."

The master of the house looked at the speaker with suddenly brimming eyes. "You are right," he said, "it is a fine thing to linger over. With his face to the foe—his face to the

foe!" He shook hands with them silently, and closed the door after them.

The hall was deserted. Its silver and gauds stood unprotected. But the two passed swiftly out to the avenue as if they were afraid of following ghosts.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN HOW ONE MAY ENTER SOCIETY WITHOUT BEING INTRODUCED

How they had come by it is little matter. It was, without any chance of dispute, a very smart dog-cart. The cob between the shafts had all the requirements—action, style and pace. The turnout, in fact, as a complete picture, glittered and flashed in the sunlight. Had you been one of the charmed circle that hunt and play polo over certain well-favored districts of Long Island you would have looked at the picture I have hastily sketched, and your first thought would have been to try and place the tall gentleman who held the whip, to recall in just what gallery he belonged; whether it was at the last hunt ball or the most recent international wedding that you had met him. If you were merely one of the vast majority outside the pale, you must perforce have hesitated not a second about assigning him and his to his evident sphere. He, his man, his trap and his horse all seemed stamped with the hall-mark of smartness.

The cob went merrily clicking over the blue-gray macadam. In the distance you could hear the ocean rolling gently against the shore; insects hummed in the sunny morning air; everything aspired to the making of pleasant moods.

"My hand has not lost its cunning," said the gentleman on the box-seat, as they turned a nasty corner most dexterously. "Yet—I quail, Billy, I positively quail at admitting the number of years since I did this sort of thing."

They drove in silence for a time, and then the same voice rang out, with a quiet chuckle: "Billy, do you realize that you look—immaculate? The fit seems tight, perhaps, but—on my word, good William, it shows your figure most exactly. A really providential fit. And mine?"

Billy nodded his head and grinned. That was notoriously the nearest approach he ever made to sociability. It was, in this case, to be construed into complete approval of the other's apparel.

"I am glad you like it. I think, myself"—he stopped to survey his trousers, his driving coat, his boots and his hat and gloves—"that it is rather neat. Do you notice how it spurs one's optimism to be well dressed, Billy? With the consciousness that not the most censorious can pick a flaw in one's exterior, how one's spirit does plume itself! A vanity, no doubt, a hollow vanity; yet, to the true philosopher, a

vanity that conceals a subtle significance. Conscious of looking our best, are we not capable of achievements we would otherwise never find courage for? Why, Billy, clad as I am, I could, without the quiver of an eyelash, assume once more that position in the world's society that, in the beginning and by rights, is mine, that—"

He ceased suddenly, his eyes roving over the gentle slopes before him. He smiled, flicked the cob over the flanks slightly, and said: "I'll do it, I'll do it."

Before them stretched the most deliciously velvet lawns, reaching up to a white mansion in the old colonial manner, pillared and wide-porched, that stood against the brow of the little hill, with elms nodding beside its roof. The gay colors of fair dresses made bright spots against the background of the picture; voices and laughter came floating down on the breeze.

"It's a risk, Billy; a great risk. But I think we can carry the thing off properly. At the worst, we can vow we've made a mistake, eh? the best of us make mistakes. Shall we join them." He nodded to the lawns that were now more clearly visible, and to the keeper's gate, that began to show around the bend of the road. Billy merely looked his bewilderment.

"Join 'em?"

"Certainly; join them—I, the members of the party on the lawn; you, the overfed

footmen and grooms. Why not? It is true, we have not been invited; but, my dear Billy, did it ever occur to you that it is the men who have not waited for invitations who have succeeded in the world? Besides, what if we are frowned on? Have we not this steed and these wheels! As for you, it is simple enough; you have merely to keep reasonably still and to refrain from sampling the liquors too indiscriminately."

Billy grunted at the tightness of his coat. He looked as if he would like to rip it open with one forcible wrench. He grunted again, as a thought came to him; a grunt half of anguish at the labor imposed by thinking, half by way of fixing Lingo Dan's attention.

"But what about—dose?" He nodded into the distance that lay behind. He seemed to be about to say more, to specify more closely, but his tongue got out nothing beyond that "dose;" the gesture over his shoulder was his only finish to his thought.

"Our late antagonists in argument, do you mean? Tush! why think of them? Let us forget them. They served us pleasantly; they were the instruments of a benign fate that desired our prosperity; they came at an opportune time to mend our fortunes; in the mending of ours, they suffered a little—that is all; they are past, they are in the behind. Have I not been tedious enough whenever I have pot-

tered about in the past? Let us forget them. Let us thank our Maker that they had such excellent tailors and were so thoughtful as to be built so exactly in the mould of—our poor selves. But otherwise—” He waved his whip significantly over the highway, as if sweeping the subject away.

But Billy, frowning and scratching his stubbly head, came upon another obstacle. “But what’s our names?”

“M or N, Billy; M or N. Which being translated means, that it all depends. Use your wits, Billy; find ’em, if you can, and use ’em. You know the first letter in our alphabet: never give a direct answer. Be as Irish as you can; never meet a question; go around it. As for me, I shall follow the cue of circumstances.”

They were passing the keeper’s lodge, their wheels scraping over the fine gravel of the winding, smoothly leveled private driveway. Neatly ordered shrubs and colorful flower-beds flanked the drive. Whirling spurts of water sprinkled the lawns at intervals. Some foxhounds came bounding over the turf, leaping beside the cob and the cart.

The cob clattered to the porte-cochere with a most spectacular flourish. The ladies on the lawn lifted their pince-nez and their eyebrows.

“Not a bit like Tommy Darrough,” said one of them.

"No," said another; "he always does it as if he were afraid of his varnish."

A figure in white muslin gave a smothered exclamation and pushed through the bevy of ladies with the haste and authority of the hostess.

"My dear Lord Orson, so good of you," she said, holding her hand out to the newcomer and smiling with the effusiveness of a marionette; "we'd really quite given you up; we were quite melancholy about it."

He shook her hand gravely.

"I should never have forgiven myself," he said.

"And you are alone?"

"My dear lady—one would always like to be alone, with you."

She laughed and tried to blush; but her own handiwork succeeded in defeating the natural wave of color.

"I mean," she continued, "that Mr. Darrough couldn't come. He telephoned me, you know, yesterday that he would bring you over and—"

"Ah, yes. That was yesterday."

"He's not ill?" She pretended quite genuine alarm.

He smiled, and began kicking the turf gently with his boot. He lowered his eyes. Then he looked, smilingly, into her eyes.

"Poor Tommy!" he began, and she gave him time for nothing more, but laughed out at him shrilly.

"Oh, I see; so stupid of me. Yes; isn't it a pity? He will, once in a while; it's in the family; he says he likes to keep the family tradition afloat. Still, sometimes he comes—like that."

"He must be very interesting—like that."

"You are quite right. He really is; he is quite witty. I tell him that he's always welcome, because when he's quite sober he's as imposing as a curate, and when he's not he's almost as clever as one of those fellows you pay to entertain you. Is he very bad?"

"Very."

"Well, I'm sorry. Still, it was awfully good of you to come alone. It hadn't occurred to me. Tommy Darrough thinks nobody can drive that cob but himself, you see—"

"I never had a horse I didn't have the same delusion about."

"But I'm dreadfully selfish. I've not presented you to a soul. I know the other women are calling me names. Come!"

She led him into the middle of the group, and for a minute or so there was a merry babbling of feminine voices. He emerged from it with a Titian-tinted beauty whose name he had faintly caught as Miss Carrick.

"Tell me," she whispered, "about Mr. Darrough."

He was still admiring the generalship with which she had steered him out of that scrimmage and annexed him. Besides, he scented danger.

"I would far rather talk about you," he said.

"You are a friend of Mr. Darrough's, aren't you?" she went on; "a real friend, I mean."

"I hope so."

"Do you know what Mrs. Noyse is saying? That Mr. Darrough is—" She put out her hands with a spreading out of the fingers. "Oh, I can't say it."

"If it were true, would you care?" He watched her, with amusement sparkling in his eyes.

"Of course. Hasn't he told you? Don't men speak of those things? We're engaged—conditionally. Do you wonder I care?"

"I admire you for caring. Darrough's to be envied." He coughed slightly. "Beautiful place of his, don't you think so?"

"Yes, yes. But you didn't tell me what I wanted to know. When you left him, was he—did he—have you no message from him for me?"

He looked at her without reply for what seemed to her an age. It was, when you think wrong thing; it needed time.

"He told me," he said, finally, "that when I found the most beautiful girl here I was to give her this." He handed her the orchid from his

buttonhole, an orchid that grew nowhere else on the island but in the greenhouses at Darrough Court. Then he turned quickly and left her clutching the flower. He meant to take a quick glance at the stables that he might assure himself on the subject of his man, but an asthmatic dowager sailed across his bows before he could escape.

"You know, Lord Orson, I knew your father. You're his image."

"You flatter me."

"Yes; you're really very like him. He proposed to me twice."

"He was always persistent."

"International marriages were not the fashion then; my father wouldn't allow it. But I was dreadfully fond of him. Did he ever speak of me?"

"Often. I was to look you up."

"Ah, I'm glad he remembers. Well, you must come and see me. We'll be in our town house again next month. Mind you come."

"How do I get there?"

"Cab it."

"Ah, of course. You're very good. I'll not forget." He bowed over her hand, leaving her rioting in her memories of youth.

"I wonder," he thought to himself, "who my father was, and who the dear old dame is, and whether that girl with the sunset hair thinks her fiance is intoxicated or only tired?"

Upon that thought the hostess broke in.

"Dear Lord Orson," she twittered, putting her head on one side, like a bird, "I'm sure you like Chopin."

"How did you tell?" he asked.

"Oh, it's in your eyes. I can always tell by a person's eyes whether they like Chopin or not. Chopin, like the soul, is all in the eyes. Do you like him *a la* Pachmann or—"

"I like Chopin when he is most Chopin-esque."

"Ah, how true that is. You are right. But when is he that?"

"Who knows? It is something one cannot define."

"Yes, that's it, isn't it? My husband never could stand Chopin. I believe he died of too much Chopin."

"One cannot avoid Chopin by dying."

"You mean he is—up higher? How beautifully you put that! Are you a musician, too? I thought all Englishmen cared for was horses and dogs. Tommy Darrough can't stand Chopin; he told me once he considered Chopin a particularly acute form of indigestion."

"Tommy's very material."

"Yes. But I do think he plays an entrancing game of polo. Of course you play?"

"What if I didn't?"

"Oh, I couldn't think it!"

"Don't you think Chopin and polo are rather extremes?"

"But they're the fashion."

"Where extremes meet and never speak to each other. Well, I do play polo; but I swore I wouldn't exhibit on this side, you see, so I'm afraid—"

"But I—I should simply love to see you. Won't you, for me?"

She leaned close to him, so that he could discern the various strata on her cheeks quite plainly.

"In that case," he said, "I shall play—if it kills me."

With that little victory to her credit, the lady of the house felt that her reputation as coquette had been lived up to, and that she could pass to other fields. "I see," she declared, with a smile that exuded intimacy of the most absolute sort, "that nobody is talking to little Miss Remsden. I shall have to do it myself; these are the things that a hostess is for," and she fluttered away, leaving him fingering his chin.

He turned, the next instant, into what seemed one of the stableyards, where a groom was apparent. He beckoned to him.

"Will you see if you can find Lord Orson's man, and say that he is to come here at once?" he said. He found some silver in the ticket-pocket of his coat, and gave it to the groom.

"Billy," he said, when that person appeared, "the thing is getting too warm. I have meddled in another man's love affair; I have promised to play music or polo, I've forgotten which, and I'm going to call on an old lady I never saw before, who lives I don't know where. No accidents so far; but I smell danger. Yes, I smell danger. Incidentally, Billy, I observe, by my sense of smell, that you have been wetting your whistle. I think you may as well consider it sufficiently moist for the present. Isn't that a back road to the drive? Yes; it is. Well, I think you'd better get some of the other grooms to harness up the dog-cart for you—do the jovial business, Billy—and be waiting just at the turn there, in case anything happens. Just as quickly as you can, mind!"

Returning, he found a shriveled up gentleman peering about, evidently looking for someone or something. "Ah," he said, as he came up, "been looking for you. I'd like to put you up at the Searinthian Yacht Club. I'm Commodore, you know. Wish you'd come up to the Newport races on my boat; nice lot of people going. What do you say, eh?"

"It's very kind of you. I'll have to put it down; I really forget, you see, how far I'm engaged ahead. I'd like to, I assure you."

"Well, then, that's all right. You'll let me know? And about the club—what's your full

name? Foolish of me not to know, but I never do remember names."

"The title will be enough."

"Oh, I see. All right." He went off, nodding his head, and giving the effect of a manikin that had supersensitive nerves.

"He wanted my full name? H'm; this is getting warm. I do hope Billy—" Here he gave an exclamation and strode down toward the lawn in front of the house. Something was attracting all the attention—something that was happening far down the park, near the gatekeeper's. The ladies were calling for opera glasses.

"Is the lodgekeeper beating his wife?" asked one, and "Tramps, I suppose," said another.

Whatever it was, it made a cloud of dust down the drive, and the noise of altercation and profanity floated over the lawns. Two figures emerged from the dust, eventually, and came tearing up the park. Such figures, too! In that picture, especially, they were queerly placed. The hats they wore were merely rims of felt; the boots had the pink of flesh peering out in odd places; the clothes were shining and discolored and ripped and ragged. The faces were smeared with blood and dust.

"It seems we're in for it," said the yachting Commodore; "your lodgekeeper did his best, but they were too much for him. Tramps or

lunatics, I suppose. Can't think why the authorities don't police the district better."

The ladies were huddled into the conservatory, peering through the glass.

The fantastic couple was still making straight for the house. It was quite impossible to discern anything of them save their extreme dirt and raggedness. Besides dirt and dust and blood they were possessed of a fury; the people in the house could hear their foaming, almost. The grooms, who had been called up, formed a line before the conservatory.

One of the figures stopped for breath and then cried out a name.

"Mrs. Noysse!" he cried, and the voice sounded thick and choked with dust and pain.

"Heavens!" said the hostess, "who is the creature?" And she told the grooms to keep the lunatics away.

The creature who had cried out made a sudden dash past one of the grooms, tore open a door of the conservatory, and gasped out what sounded like:

"Edith!"

"Tommy!" shrieked Miss Carrick, putting one hand in front of her as if to warn away a ghost. "Tommy Darrough!"

"Yes, that's it," said the figure, "though I don't blame you for not knowing me." And he sat down and began fanning himself with

the doormat. They crowded all about the disreputable figure and began to ask questions. But he shook his head and warded off with both arms. "I want some whisky," he said, "and I want it now. Then I'll tell you."

"But, Tommy," said Miss Carrick, gently, "must it be whisky? Lord Orson told us, you know, that you——"

Darrough stared at her, as if asking himself whether it was he or she that was crazy.

"Lord Orson?" he repeated. "What in the world do you mean?"

Miss Carrick turned to look for the person mentioned, that he might confirm her.

"Where is Lord Orson?" she asked.

"Permit me," said a new voice. It was that of the other tattered figure. This figure took off its rim of what had been a hat, bowed its dusty rags almost to the ground, and said: "Permit me. I am Lord Orson." A ghastly red line through the caked grime on his face widened as he spoke, showing the lips.

Miss Carrick was peering into Darrough's face. "It's you, Tommy, I see that; it's you; I know the voice and I know the eyes. But if that's Lord Orson, who was it that came in your dog-cart, and——?"

"They drove away ten minutes ago by the back drive," said a groom at that moment in reply to the hostess' question.

Everybody looked at everybody else.

"In my dog-cart?" said Darrough; "in mine, did you say? Oh, Lord; oh Lord; don't you see, Orson; don't you see?"

But Lord Orson was calling for whisky-and-water and a hot bath. They bore him off to where he could get both, leaving the ladies besieging Darrough, who was rocking with laughter that cracked the dirt on his face as an earthquake cracks the world's crust.

"Who was he?" he repeated. "Lord only knows!"

CHAPTER VII

FROM WHICH IT WOULD APPEAR THAT DUCKS
MAY BE PREFERABLE TO DUCATS

An old man, brown and bent, splashing through the marshes and over the meadows, clumsy rubber boots reaching to his hips, and a gun over his shoulder, stopped suddenly, just as the sun rose like a copper halo over the waters of the Sound.

"Bless my soul!" he remarked, "it's funny what will wash in with the tide sometimes!"

He stooped and, taking note that the two men were fast asleep, picked up the guns that lay near them, fingered them for a few moments, put them down again, and took to scratching his beard. He considered the two figures a moment, and then looked vaguely to the Southward. "Easterly weather before the day's over," he mused, "Low tides, like as not. Ha! There goes a bunch of red-heads, now!" And he watched a flight of ducks heading for the coves further up the river. When he looked down again, it was to find the taller of the two men awake, and regarding him with a smile.

"Do you mind telling me," said the tall person, in a singularly alluring voice, "where in the world we are?"

The little old man looked over the marsh, with his eyebrows lifting. "Good Lord," he remarked, to the marsh, it seemed, "he doesn't know where he is! That's good, that is!"

"A valuable jest, I make no doubt. But scarce a hospitable one. Consider, my old man of the sea, we are strangers; is this frivolity of yours quite meet for wayfaring folk who have, in all the world, no means to keep away the tricks of Fate, save these." And he leveled his gun at the old man, with a rude sign to his companion, long since wakened by the noise of voices, to do the same. "To voice again the worn refrain: We have nothing in the world but these weapons. Will you pity the poor strangers?"

But the old man looked at them with a light of amusement sparkling in his eyes.

"Yes," he said, "nice guns, too. Damascus barrels, English, hand-made. Nice guns. They'll give you ten dollars a piece for them in New Edinbro, anytime you want to hock them." If there was threat of personal violence in the tall man's speech or pose, the little old hunter was, to all outward seeming, quite innocent of it.

"It were a pity to spoil so merry an ancient with powder and shot, eh, Billy? The world

is never too full of merry men. Shall we refrain from our obvious advantage?"

Billy nodded, and they dropped their guns to the grass.

"Might just as well," said the other, "neither one of 'em's loaded." Whereon he cocked his own gun.

"Fairly beaten, Billy, fairly beaten!" The tall man rocked, with a cackling laughter. Then he rose to his feet with a ceremonial flourish that sat most fantastically upon his water-soaked, spotted and ragged apparel. "Sir," he went on, "I take the honor of presenting to you myself, whom the gods of chance and euphony long since named Lingo Dan, and my companion in campaigns against mischance, Billy. We bow to a superior soul. We are outwitted, and so early in the day, too, by your dear, good self. You removed the shells before ever we awoke! A noble inspiration; I could not have done better myself. Will you not inform us who it is so honors us?"

"My name's Tim Held."

"Well, Mr. Held, we apologize, I vow to you, we apologize most humbly. Here we come, I suppose, trespassing upon your domains, and offering you, almost at the outset of our acquaintance, but scant civility. But it shall be a lesson to me, Mr. Held, ever to suspect a superiority of soul even when clothed in khaki."

"No khaki on me, Mr. Dan. Dead grass color I wears, always, in the duckin' season o' year. What's khaki?"

"A synonym, Mr. Held, for your own colors. Dead grass? Much stouter Anglo-Saxon, much better really. Will you have a little Medford, Mr. Held? It's all the fates have left us. Poor food, perhaps, yet it holds warmth and light." He turned to Billy, "A drink for Mr. Held, good William!"

With much profane reluctance, Billy pulled a bottle from his pocket, and handed it to Held. The latter took it, smelt at the rim, swept a quick look at the others, and gulped the rum down, with a fine smacking of the lips afterwards. He was passing the bottle back again, but Lingo Dan waved him to retain it. "I will tell you how we came here. Listening is oft more dry than talking. Keep it to sustain you against my being tedious. Though, to tell the truth, the thing is absurdly simple. We have driven our carriage, Mr. Held—but, let that pass. The last of many mischances stranded us upon this pleasant coast, with nothing to call our own, save these guns, this liquor and that immortal courage, Mr. Held, of which one Henley has sung. We were in a small boat; we came to shore at dusk; we thought to find a habitable spot, so, beaching the boat, we walked into these reeds and marshes, and, to tell the bitter fact, we lost our-

selves; we are rudderless in a wilderness; all creeks look alike, and one meadow is as brown as another, one bunch of cat-tails just the same as another. Well, Mr. Held we prayed to the Good God—you should hear Billy pray, Mr. Held, you really should!—to send us salvation in the morning. And here you are, Mr. Held, here you are. Thank the gods, Billy, for answering our prayers!"

But of Billy's ensuing remarks it is safe only to declare that they had nothing to do with any gods, save the nethermost.

"And now, Mr. Held, will you not tell us where we are? How near to the railway? How near to a village, and telegrams, and all the outer sentries of civilization?"

Held, before he answered, took another pull at the rum. "Good old Medford," he muttered into his beard. Then he lifted his eyes to Lingo Dan. "If I tells you you're in Frog Cove, near Pugg Harbor, and ten miles from Old Pond Station, what better off are you? I'll tell you something, Mr. Dan, the man doesn't live, outside o' myself, that can take you straight into yonder clump of cat-tails, and take you safe out again. What have I shot ducks over these marshes twenty years for, if I don't know 'em like a book now, tell me that, will you?" He shouldered his gun, and walked towards the clump of reeds he had indicated. "I'll show you something," he said,

trudging ahead. The others following him, walked side by side. "The rum works, Billy," whispered Lingo Dan, "it works. A better weapon than powder, sometimes. As we know to our sorrow."

They crashed their way through what seemed an impenetrable thicket of brown, crackling reeds. The cat-tails were at least two feet taller than even Lingo Dan; when you looked up you gazed as if from a prison upon the vault of sky overhead; all else was a narrow cage of brown. In the distance you could hear the tide beating against the easterly wind. Now and then the heavy rushing of a flight of ducks cut the air over their heads. Presently they found themselves before a hut of rude planking. So low was the roof of it, and so high the ambushade of cat-tails, that you did not see the hut until you almost stepped upon its lintel. Held pushed open the door, and showed them the cot, and the shelf that constituted his furnishing. "Here," he said, as he waved them to a seat on the cot, "is where I live—most of the time. What with this, and a good gun, and a boat—Lord love you, I'm as happy as the run of folks. Heap more happy than some, I'm thinking. I've solved the great problem, you see, of how little it takes for a man to live on. Look at me; do I look starved? No. Well; I catch fish, and I dig clams, and I shoot ducks; I've got God's free

air and light; in summer there's the sun and the wind to cool me, and in winter there's driftwood enough on the islands here to keep me warm as toast." He paused, and handed some tobacco to his vistor. "Is a millionaire much better off?"

Lingo Dan smiled slightly. "I have never been a millonaire—in the actual," he allowed. "But I admit that you are a very exceptional person, Mr. Held. You have solved the secret of content with the most elemental methods. You have triumphed where the majority is utterly blind. I, upon my word, I envy you. And yet—and yet, do you never feel the need of money, of human intercourse?"

Held put the bottle to his lips again, and his head, at this swig, went back for quite a long time. His eyes began to glisten. "Money," he said, "what's money? Barrin' rum, what'll it bring you? What's the use of it—here?" And he swept his arm in a circle that took in the entire marsh. "If I wants a drink a rum or so, all I has to do is drop a line to one of the shooting gentlemen in town that knows me. Then they comes to the hotel in New Edinbro, or in Old Pond, and I guide them out duck shooting. They gets the sport and the ducks, and I gets the sport and the money. As for society—give me ducks, Mr. Dan, give me ducks. Some folks spend their lives studyin' other folks; 'far's I'm concerned, I finds

ducks a heap more interestin'. 'Ever get up in the grey of the dawn, when there's fog on the river and the marshes, and push your boat through the sloughways and the ditches, and jump the ducks as they're feeding? Ever sit behind a blind of reeds for all the high-tide hours and wait for the wind and the tide to drive the ducks into your decoys; see 'em swirl about and around, and then drop, just like that, paff, in front of your gun? Ever sit in the twilight and wait for the evening flight of ducks, your ears straining for the whista, whista of the wings that you can't see till they're right over you; or look for them to fly across the moonlight? Ever get so you think you knew just where this bunch feeds, or that, and then lay for 'em, and have 'em fool you? Ever live twenty years trying to circumvent their cunning tricks and be as eager at the end as when you were just beginning? Ever try any of those things? No. I thought not. Don't talk to me of people! Ducks is a heap more exciting. Give me ducks, Mr. Dan, every time! Give me ducks!"

The old man's eyes were glistening more and more brightly, and words came to him with a rush and a riot that was sometimes too great for his lips. As he took another pull at the bottle, Lingo Dan, looked significantly at Bill. Held set the bottle down upon the table presently, and turned to hang up his gun. In

that instant Lingo Dan substituted an almost full bottle of rum for the nearly empty one that had been set down. "Good old Medford!" murmured Held, wiping his lips again, after another swallow. "Old Medford brings a man's ambitions back, seems to me. I've not lived here always, you know; oh, no, not always. Time was when I had money—and thought money was the only thing in the world. Lord, I'm wiser now. Suppose I envy the brokers and the rich men's sons that come down to Old Pond for the shooting, and hire me to guide for 'em? Envy? Not much! They're pursuing the problem I've solved, that's the way I figure it out. If I wanted money—good Cæsar, it's easy enough to make money! Easy enough! Haven't I had a stock broker down here, right in this cabin, drunk as a lord for ten days on end, and him playing the market every day, through me goin' up to the telegraph office for him with his instructions, and him clearing ten thousand dollars just like—that! And him drunk as a sailor, or a fiddler, or any sponge what ever was! And do you think I envied him the money? Me, Tim Held? Bosh! I takes gentlemen out shooting, and I has to be polite and let them wipe my eye for fear they hire another guide that won't shoot as straight as I do, and that kind of politeness kind of hurts, for I do hate to miss a duck just because it

might make a gentleman jealous—but, money!" Mr. Held confided his tremendous scorn of the idea to the bottle beside him.

"Ten thousand dollars, you said?" Lingo Dan's voice was tense and his eyes flashed with a sudden resolve.

"That's what I said. Ten thousand. While you could say Jack Ro-hic-binson. Gentlemen, excuse me, I'm most 'xtraordinary sleepy. Make yourselves perfectly at home. Better stay, better stay; never find your way alone. Find some pilot-bread on shelf. I'm—sleepy." He slid to the floor, and his beard sank upon his chest, so that he presented a rather pitiful spectacle; an old man, who had solved a wonderful problem and yet had left a loophole to one enemy.

"How far," Dan shook the old man by the shoulder, "how far did you say it was to Old Pond station?"

"Fair tide and fair wind, you're right there now; tide and wind against you it's five miles. Lemme sleep. No use—your tryin'. Never find the river—get lost again. Lemme sleep." And the next moment Mr. Held was asleep.

Rum," observed Lingo Dan, sententiously, as he regarded the prostrate figure of his host, "affects different people differently. Some it makes taciturn, some loquacious. Some it turns honest; others—naturally honest, it makes rogues. I have given the subject some

study, and some experiment, Billy, in my time. In this case I should say that we had before us an honest old fellow, whom rum renders loquacious instead of leaving him, as he naturally is, taciturn; whom it deprives utterly of his usual principles of right and wrong, and whom it robs, for the time, of memory. I have seen them so before. So have you. You may not have analyzed the matter, Billy, but I am sure you agree with me, eh?"

"Damned waste of good rum, if you ask me?" was Billy's growling answer.

"I think not, Billy, I think not. It is merely part of the capital we risk in a venture that the maundering of this ancient mariner has suggested to me. It is very simple. The man can be kept, I am sure, in a sort of trance. With diplomacy he can be guided to our ends. His morals may leave him, but not his sense of topography. That, as it chances, is our salvation. For he is right, Billy, we could never find our way to civilization out of this place. We could be killed, and eaten, and the world would be no wiser. Well—that makes it all the simpler. My plan, briefly, Billy, is to have the old fellow get one of his sporting, drinking stock-brokers, come down for a bit of shooting. Eh, Billy, a bit of shooting?"

Billy considered the other's face thickly. From long association with him he had ac-

quired a certain foggy appreciation of his tortuous introductions.

"Murder, d'y mean? And boodle?"

"Bah! You should know me better! Nothing so foolish, nothing so primitive. Those things always leak out; I do not explain; but it is a way they have. Even in this sequestered spot, I suppose, one could not sink a body so deep but what some interfering tide would wash it right into the heart of some fishing village. I have, dear heaven knows, no superstitions, but I have noticed that in these matters there are agencies as mysterious as the tides themselves. Besides," he smiled at Billy, as if he were making love to him, "there would be far less profit in that. No; it is just—just a bit of shooting. And wonderfully easy shooting at that. As long as the rum holds out, this old fellow" he kicked his foot in the direction of Held "is our absolute tool. All he need do is to write to one of his shooting patrons; the man will arrive, we will—h'm—detain him here, with the fine shooting and the good cheer. And nothing, you see, Billy, nothing need interfere with his usual habits of speculating on the stock exchange. You wouldn't deny a man a thing like that, would you, Billy? Billy, Billy, Billy! Such shocking language! How you do veil your affection for me, now and then, with the profanest symbols! Upon my word—" He took Billy

suddenly by the shoulder, and the grip cannot have been a light one for the other winced under it, "Billy, sometimes you irritate me! Don't you see? We'll make him speculate—for us!"

* * * * *

A week later many of the moves that Lingo Dan had marked upon his plan of campaign had been successfully made. Tim Held's mental obliquity had been correctly gauged. It had struck the old man as rather a good joke that he should sit down and write to Mr. Richard Erringham such a letter as would be sure, if that well-known metropolitan and fast-living speculator, were not ill or out of town, to bring him post-hast to Old Pond station. The liquor with which he was being skillfully plied kept him from a too great coherency of reflection, while it by no means prevented him from inditing a scrawl that Mr. Erringham at once recognized as characteristic and authentic. "Mr. Erringham. Dear Sir:" ran the letter, "there is a good flight of ducks on. Your tongue is looking fine. Yours, Tim." That was all, but when he received it, Mr. Erringham, who knew the writer's laconic habits, took a hasty look at the state of the market, and then at the time tables. He was satisfied in both directions. His interests seemed at a tide where he could handle them as safely from a distance as from his office; his luck was pro-

verbial and notorious, and had withstood both the excessive sobriety of others and his own intemperance. There was a train which, allowing for time to drive to his apartments, and have his shooting-clothes packed, would suit admirably. The train happened to be the Limited Courier, and there were a number of men he knew in the buffet-car. With the prospect of his partial holiday before him, he gave such free reign to his instinctive conviviality that when the local running between the Junction and Old Point deposited him at the latter station he was in a most comfortable condition of artificial happiness. At the Pond Inn, where he spent the night, and where Tim Held was to meet him on the following morning, he continued his imbibations so mightily that when Mr. Held came for him there was little to choose between them for fearful and wonderful burlesques upon supersolemn sobriety. The good people at the Inn merely smiled; they had seen the thing before, with exactly the same players in the roles. They were accustomed to the curious ways of gentlemen from town, who came, sometimes, for a fortnight's shooting, only to get disgusted and return after 24 hours, or for the week end, ostensibly, yet lingered in the marshes for a month. As for Lingo Dan, when Billy protested, in blustering profanity, against allowing Held to go alone to bring Mr. Erringham to the marsh, he ex-

plained that he felt no qualms at all; Held would go through the motions of his mission from sheer use and habit; walking in a dream of alcohol though he might be, he was yet sure to walk in his old, familiar ruts; he would descant upon the shooting to Erringham, listen to the other's rhapsodies about the fresh air with polite composure, and never row, in his journey down the river to the marshes, so much as one superfluous stroke.

Certainly there was nothing in Erringham's reception of the two strangers to suggest that he was anything but pleased. He was in a mood that proclaimed "the more the merrier" as his guiding text. He would be the last to blame Tim Held for sharing the solitude of the marshes, that was certain; besides there would be the more guns with which to attack the wily enemy, the dusky, the red-head, the broad-bill, and the dipper duck.

There had been a day's shooting in which the webfooted enemy had, as it chanced, had decidedly the best of the encounter. The most skilful and sober of men are not always successful in circumventing the cunning of ducks in a region where the latter are, after all, wild and scarce; when two of the guns are held before eyes that can scarcely see the sights, and other two by men utterly unused to the flight and habits of the duck, there is likely to be but a small bag. All the more reason, therefore,

for drinking, on the eve of that experience, to a better day coming.

When the morrow came, there came with it, in Erringham's mind, the craving for his wonted speculation. His stimulated nerves told him that he was infallible this day; he had the curiously certain feeling that comes to those believing themselves possessed of so-called second sight.

"Have to play the market to-day, Tim," said Erringham, "Feel it in my bones. You row me to Old Pond, and I'll do the rest." He tried to walk towards the boat, where it was moored in the reeds, but his legs refused to hold him up, and he slid onto the floor. He laughed aloud. "Tim! Oh, Tim! This—infernal cabin of yours is—umph—on the bias. I'd be all right once I—umph—got in the boat. But—umph—can't get to the beastly old tub. You'll have to—umph—go in for me, Tim. Done it before, you have." He lurched to his feet again, and clung to the shelf in the wall. "Where's the bottle?" he asked.

Lingo Dan put his hand on Erringham's shoulder. "Look here, I'll help you along. If you want the market played I'll go in to Old Pond with Tim, and you and Billy here can go take a crack at the ducks. We'll be back before you have a chance to lose yourselves. Or you can hide the boat in the Cove, put out the decoys on Back River, and wait for us. Fact is,"

here he lowered his voice and almost whispered, "Tim's a little, well, under the weather, don't you think?"

"Maybe he is," said Erringham. "Hadn't noticed. Maybe he is. All right, we're all friends. Here's the message, and the cipher signature. So long!"

Lingo Dan gasped silently. He had not thought the thing would be so easy. He had been prepared for diplomacy, persuasion, almost for browbeating. And here the thing had almost been flung at him! He picked up the slip of paper, and cautiously steered Tim into the boat.

The message read, briefly, that Erringham's partner was to buy Consolidated Collieries. Only Erringham and his partner knew the cipher that signed telegrams passing between them, so there could be no question of these instructions not being acted upon. Lingo Dan laughed silently to himself as he considered how simple it all was. As he and Tim rowed the boat back to the marshes his eyes in fancy beheld the quotation on Consolidated Collieries risen, in the next 24 hours, from the 67 at which the newspaper just purchased at Old Pond showed it, to something fabulous. All he would need to do then would be to wire, with the same cipher signature, for some huge remittance. If there were any cheques to be signed—anything at all, indeed, to be signed,

—it was fairly safe to say that Mr. Erringham was in a condition to cheerfully sign his all away without a murmur or a regret. Besides, Dan magnanimously told himself, he would really aim at nothing more than the profit this present transaction was to bring. Mr. Erringham, it was true, was in so amiable a state that it might have been possible to get him to sign a cheque over to him then and there, without any trickery at all, but there would, Dan reflected, be no scent of danger, of real intrigue about that. Such a scheme was without the savor of science. Besides, Mr. Erringham was, as he had admitted in his cups, none too well off just now; he had been playing on the losing side for months, and his capital was shrunk to a very small figure indeed; he could suffer little in the way of further losses, and it was not until this present occasion that he had really felt a keen sense of having struck a winning streak. He had never touched Consolidated Collieries before; this speculation in it, that he was directing from the hidden wilderness of a marsh, was his most desperate fight for his financial life. Lingo Dan knew better than to sap, by any hurried folly, the slender Erringham capital. But once the great winning was made—ah, that was quite another matter.

But, when the trip to Old Pond was made on the following day, with a repetition of Erringham's message, to buy more C. C. stock, the

newspaper showed that the price was now three points lower. Lingo Dan calculated quickly. He knew that there was a definite understanding between Erringham and his partner as to how many thousand shares were to be bought or sold on each wired advice; his reckoning told him that the decline of three points had already, if there was no recovery, made a terrible inroad upon Erringham's capital.

But Mr. Erringham received the news very jovially. He and Billy were sitting upon little square boxes where the low tide had left the meadow bare; the reeds hid them from view, and they were alternately shooting at the decoys floating before them and increasing their own holdings of alcoholic cargo. After each drink they declared there were several wild ducks sitting among the decoys; then they would each let drive with both barrels and scatter splinters from the decoys all over the water.

"Gone down, has it?" said Mr. Erringham. "Never mind; luck bound to turn. Look at those—umph—lovely ducks we shot. Look at 'em; ain't they got the loveliest manners—umph—you ever saw. We shot 'em all, we did. All the same, shooting ducks or playing market; luck's with me—luck's with me,—me,—umph—Erringham. You know Erringham—umph—luck, don't you.

Nevertheless, this time, the famous Erringham luck seemed asleep. Consolidated Col-

lieries went steadily, slowly, fraction by fraction point by point, down, down, until the day came when Lingo Dan reckoned, in his cold-blooded way that Mr. Erringham was a bankrupt. It was a bitter blow to him, but he would certainly play the wise part now; he would saddle himself with no further responsibilities. There was no knowing what might happen. When realization came to the bemuddled Erringham there might be a tragedy, and ugly rumors, and—well, in fine, it was better to be going before the crash came.

He made a plan or two accordingly.

When Erringham reached for the bottle next morning, it was empty. He roared with rage. His nerves shook. His voice rose high. But there was not a drop, not a drop. Lingo Dan had seen to that.

“Got to have some,” roared Erringham. “Got to have it. What? No money! Oh—” and he roared out an oath! He put his hand into his pocket, and pulled out a twenty-dollar gold piece. “Here, get me something to drink, quick. And wire the firm to buy Consolidated Collieries. Mad? Who said I was mad? You do what I tell you, d’ye hear, Tim Held, and you, too, Mr. Dan. What I want is—whisky—don’t you see the fix I’m in—don’t you see? ’til I get it?” Indeed, there was on him the sudden terror of a house that has lost its foundations. His limbs shook with dread; he was

in the fearful condition of the drunkard who is without the drink that he must needs "taper off" on.

Lingo Dan hauled Billy into the boat with Held and himself.. They shoved off, leaving Mr. Erringham helplessly cursing. When they reached the open meadow by the river-shore, all the intricacies of the creeks past, Lingo Dan and Billy suddenly forced the boat's nose to the bank, and lifted old Held to the meadow.

The old man looked at the sun and the sky in a dazed way, and then smiled maudlinly at the two in the boat.

"No cover here," he said, "no cover at-all. No ducks fool enough to come here."

"Oh," said Lingo Dan, "if you will pardon my frankness, a pest on you and your ducks. We have enjoyed your hospitality; but it becomes monotonous. We had intended some celebration on the strength of your speculative friend's success; but his failures grow dispiriting. Neither good old Medford nor equally ancient Monongahela can bolster up one's spirits against such a succession of failures. We owe you a deal in the way of information concerning ducks, Mr. Held, but in the matter of ducks we have been shamefully deceived. You led us to believe that your stockbroker was an invariable winner, and here he has done nothing but lose for a week or more. For no other

reason did we linger in your marshy abode. Fie upon you, Mr. Held, for your cruel deception. Was it any way to treat two strangers, two bits of human floatsam thrown upon your mercy? Was it kind? Was it just?"

Tim Held did not understand the words very accurately, but the tone of voice affected him, and the liquor was potent in him. He began to weep.

"Fie on you, Tim Held, and you so old! Your head is white, and your deeds so black! Oh, fie, Tim Held!"

And they pushed off, leaving Held sitting on the sodden meadow, weeping.

* * * * *

Two days later, in a city lodging-house, Lingo Dan, reading the newspaper, started, read again, and smilingly handed the sheet to Billy, his finger touching a certain line.

The line read thus: "Consolidated Collieries Soar. A fifteen point rise." And in the paragraph below was mention of the fact that the greatest coup made in this stock was to the credit of Mr. Richard Erringham who had been buying the stock for ten days past.

Lingo Dan sighed.

"I shouldn't wonder," he said, "if the fool gives old Held something out of his winnings." He sighed again. "Heigh ho. I wish I had thought more of ducks, Billy, and not so much of ducats."

CHAPTER VIII

WHICH DWELLS UPON LINGO DAN'S METHOD OF BEAUTIFYING THE SUBURBS

"Take notice, Bowlsy," said Finnegan, who was conductor 432 in the company's books.

Bowlsy, with one hand still on the trolley rope, looked over to where Finnegan's head was mysteriously bobbing. One of the cars of the ocean service had just run in under the shed and was discharging its passengers. An astonishingly large number of pretty girls poured out onto the stone flags of the terminus, followed by an almost equal number of handsome, well-groomed young men. To right and left they scattered, some making for surface, some for elevated roads, some walking briskly over toward the public buildings. Cars came grinding and spark-spitting over the curves, constantly discharging and taking on their human complements. Gongs sounded the start; policemen strode back and forth amid the crowd; the motormen swung their gloved hands together against the cold, and from overhead came the noise of the Elevated.

"Well," said Bowlsy, with something of resentment in his tone, "I don't see nothing great."

"Yez saw the ocean car?"

"I did."

"Then did yez not take notice that the good-lookers always comes in bunches? I tell ye, me boy, if it was not for taking notice of human nature, I would not be conductor on a trolley car."

"Oh ho; yis! Yez would be a philosopher, or the like of that. Oh, yis! I doubt the superintendent has no thought but what yez ring up fares for a living, Finnegan. Will I tell him that yez do it mostly as a favor and to teach philosophy? Oh ho, Finnegan!" Bowlsy blew on his fingers and danced a jig on the platform of his car. He roared again with tremendous gusts of laughter. "Oh ho, Finnegan, the philosopher!"

"Bowlsy, yez shame the service. Take notice of the folks we gives a ride to, and ye'll be wiser than yez are now. Take notice, I tell yez. As sure as yez live, the good ones comes in bunches, and so does the other lot. Yez get the car onst filling up with nagurs and Chinees and Dagoes, and its nagurs and Chinees and Dagoes to the end of the trip. But get a few likely looking women in the car, and ye'll see the swells coming in as if yez was a Fifth avenoo

stage. Have yez never taken notice of that, Bowlsy?"

"I dunno but what you're right, Finnegan," said the other conductor, as he helped a washerwoman with her bundle up the steps of his car, "but sure I never took thought of it before. If yez say true, then there is laundries and biscuit-shooters coming to me this trip. Did yez see the fat one that I have to carry for one fare."

"I took notice," said Finnegan, solemnly, "and I should argue—"

But the gong sounded for Bowlsy's car to start, and off it went, jarring noisily over the curves and spitting sparks in to the air overhead. Bowlsy nodded at Finnegan, and the latter climbed to his own platform, waiting his turn. Thoughtfully he surveyed the interior of his car. "I take notice," he said again, as if he were still addressing Bowlsy, "that they always come in bunches." Then, at the signal, he put his hand to the rope and released the brake. Presently he was swinging along over the bridge, with the river shining below him and the lights on either shore twinkling like the stars of a nethed world.

Just as Finnegan's car left the terminus a tall man, who had been leaning against a pillar the while the two conductors had been exchanging their little sallies, suddenly broke into a luminous, lingering smile. "By jove!" he said

vigorously, "I believe the thing's feasible. Not only feasible, but, as the hacks on the newspapers say, both profitable and entertaining. Thanks to Finnegan! A great man, Finnegan!"

And, still smiling, he left the place with energetic, far-reaching strides.

The very next day he went to the offices of the Trolley Company. The company's list of conductors was full, but his name could go on the waiting list. When the tall man gave his name, the machine that stood behind the counter smiled faintly. "I see," said this machine, "that you give your name in the—what I may call the directory manner." And he wrote the name in his book, carefully, thus:

"Lingo, Dan."

* * * * *

Several months afterward Finnegan and Bowlsy happened again to be waiting at the bridge terminus together.

"There comes the beauty car," said Finnegan, as the car came swinging in under the shed. "Mornin', Dan!" The just arrived conductor of what Finnegan had termed the beauty car nodded and smiled. Finnegan watched the thirty-odd well-dressed, good-looking people of both sexes stream out of Dan's car, and then nodded his head sententiously.

"Do yez mind, Bowlsy, how I have always said the good ones comes in bunches, and the

bad ones comes in bunches? There's no proof needed now. There's Dan's beauty car to prove it."

Indeed, the beauty car was known all over the company's lines. How it was done, nobody knew, but the fact was that, regularly as clockwork, the car that Dan brought into town between half-past ten and half-past eleven in the morning was as full of beautiful women and handsome men as a pomegranate is of seeds. Outward bound the beauty car made its trip about four in the afternoon.

The fame of the beauty car was not confined to the employes of the Trolley Company. It spread all along the district through which Dan's trip took him. The results were gradual, but sure. The class of buildings improved noticeably, and the drift of fashion turned in the direction where good-looking human beings appeared, as all the stories agreed, to be so plentiful. The price of real estate went up. All the little desolate shanties and their poverty-stricken, ragged population disappeared.

Presently only fine villas flanked the tracks. Beauty was begetting beauty. The suburb through which Dan's car passed was presently known all over the city as the home of the finest beauties for miles around. The most desirable bachelors moved to the streets giving on to this trolley line. Following the bache-

lors came dowagers with marriageable daughters.

To see the beauty car passing and arriving was akin to watching the observation car of an Empire State Express. Yet there was no difference, outwardly, between the beauty car and any other car in the service of the Trolley Company. The fare was the same.

The difference was the conductor of the beauty car. He was tall, and his face was strangely refined for one in his position. Yet he had by no means the look of a man grudging doing work beneath his position. He was constantly smiling; he seemed happy. The more aristocratic villas sprang up beside the trolley tracks, the more constant grew Dan's smile.

Dan smiled, too, to think how childishly easy was his system of filling his car with good looks. He was, after all, merely acting on Finnegan's philosophy. He picked up a pretty girl or two, and the run of chance was always that some swagger men appeared presently on the next corner. Then, somehow or other, the sight of these well-set-up males always attracted other pretty women. So it went. As for the ugly ones, the laborers, the peddlers, the washerwomen—the great unwashed, in fact—why, he simply never stopped for them! Dan often laughed to himself to think how simple it all was. Two vigorous pulls at the

bell, and his car went bravely past the cursing section-men or the jabbering Chinamen, and never stopped at all in its disdainful career until it reached a corner where some pretty women or good-looking men stood. Oh, that was too easy, too easy! But that, after all, was mere entertainment. The profit was another matter. Yet even that was entertaining. Dan chuckled as he thought of it all.

On one rare night, when he got a holiday that coincided with his motorman's night off, the two sat together in a little room which looked over the East River. Dan held a sheet of paper before him, and, in the intervals of his meditation, offered commentaries.

"Billy," he said, "the thing becomes monotonous. It is too facile, far too facile. Moreover, it is legitimate business; I do not overlike the too legitimate. A little touch of roguery adds charm, somehow, eh, Billy? And yet the thing is certainly romantic. Billy, if this present system of mine be not genius, will you be so considerate as to define the article for me? You can't? I thought not. Think of what it is I am doing. I am, to all intents and purposes, making a fashionable quarter out of what used to be a slum. I have made the beauty car one of the sights of the town. And, incidentally—" he patted the paper before him — "I have added to our little, little——"

"Wad!" said Billy, gruffly.

"Thank you! I loathe the word, but it comes pat at times. Yes, it is a noble system, truly. Thanks, first to Finnegan, and then, Billy, to you. Were it not that you aided me in disdaining to stop the beauty car for the unbeautiful my method were impracticable. But as it is——"

He paused and looked wistfully out of the window. "I assure you, Billy, sometimes the tameness of the thing palls on me." He penciled for a moment on the paper before him. "Why did the plan never strike anyone else? Anyone could do it—anyone. I crowd my car with beautiful women, and then I pack my back platform with smart men, and then—oh, the rest is child's play. I single out a man, I lead him on to talk. After a day or so he begins to ask me if I know who such and such a girl is. I find out who he is. I arrange meetings and accidents and appointments. Gradually I know who is who for miles around. My car becomes a marriage bureau, and I—Billy—I am the director."

He got up and paced the floor in nervous energy.

"And the commissions, Billy, are by no means to be despised. The men pay well—oh, yes; they pay well. They know I could take the car past their noses any day I wanted to. And each one of them thinks he is the only one that I—h'm!—grant my favors to. Of

course, I never tax the girls. Chivalry forbids. Although I will admit that in the case of a fat dowager or so, with designs upon some handsome youth, I have relaxed my rule on this score."

There was silence for a time, and then Dan began again.

"I have a premonition, Billy, that the system is about drained dry. That is why I give the matter so much thought to-night. Notice these figures; not bad for a year, eh? We might have run more risk and done much worse, eh? If the worst comes to the worst, we can—h'm!—see a little life with that, eh? The fact is, Billy, I see the end coming. There is a widow—think of it, Billy, a widow—haunting me. She is ruining the complexion of the beauty-car. For weeks I avoided her. You may remember, Billy, the woman who was wont to stand at the corner of the Park Slope Drive, and past whom I always signaled you to fly with such especial speed. A little woman, with black, shiny eyes, and a most dogged chin. I knew her at once for a woman of character; when the car sailed past her, she used merely to smile thinly and look at me. Now she has taken to walking to the starting point and getting into the car before it starts. And she watches me—oh, Lord, Billy, how she watches me! I have not arranged a lovers' meeting

these ten days past, but I have felt that woman's eyes fixed on me."

"Stuck on you, I guess." Billy grunted his suspicion.

"Perhaps. And all the worse. If she drives me to bay, Billy, it simply means an end—an end to the beauty-car."

"He puffed at his pipe, folded up some papers and went on. "We have enough to try other climes with. We leave, moreover, with the consciousness of benefits bestowed. I have made various young people happy. I have made smooth the trolley track of love, and I have invented and perfected the Beauty Car." He spoke the term in capitals. "When I go, its secret goes with me. I might, of course, were I some mere mechanical mercenary spirit, go sell the story to the newspapers the moment that my widow threatened unpleasantness. For, of course, I know what will happen. She will seek to coerce me with threats of taking her story to the company. But if I merely escape, if she finds I am no longer with the company, she has not wit enough to tell the tale. I know her well enough for that. And so the secret stays with us. We have enough—for present cakes and ale, at least—and future gain shall never tempt me to cut off my left hand that my right may take to penny-a-lining."

Then they composed themselves to slumber.

* * * * *

A few weeks afterward Finnegan and Bowlsy were doing a warmth-producing breakdown, side by side, in the company's barns.

"'Twas queer about the beauty car," said Finnegan.

"Yes, that it was," said Bowlsy.

"Comes in all gay and gorgeous, one day, and the next 'tis filled with Irish biddies and garlic-eating Dagoes, and stableboys with smell enough of horses to make you think the car was the Garden Horse Show week. And the motorman and Dan both absent and resigned.

"'Tis mighty strange!"

"And yet they say they went out, both of them, with as clean a sheet as ever the company saw. All straight and trim and clean and square. I do not understand."

"A clever man, was Dan."

"Yes; that he was. And, did I tell yez? Yesterday I gets a letter. I takes no notice of the postmark. There's nothing in it but a twenty-dollar bill, and words like this: 'A Christmas Present, to Finnegan, Philosopher, from Dan, Practician.' Now, what the jiminy's 'practician,' Bowlsy?"

"I do not know," said Bowlsy. "Was the bill good?"

"Take notice," said Finnegan, and handed up a twenty-dollar certificate.

"'Tis good," said Bowlsy.

"Take notice," said Finnegan, stuffing the bill into his pocket again, "it is the profits of philosophy."

CHAPTER IX

CONCERNING MURDER AND SOME SPECULATION IN COMEDY

"Listen, Billy. Listen!"

From the adjoining room, a moment before, there had come the noise of some one entering, then an indefinite sound of a fall or a blow, and now a something that was half moaning, half laughing.

Still warning Billy to silence, Lingo Dan stepped softly to the partition. "I knew," he whispered, "that this pleasant device of mine would serve us some day." He shifted a small disk of wood, and applied one eye to the hole in the wall.

Suddenly he stepped back, gripped Billy's arm, and made for the door. "Quietly, Billy, and pin his arms," he urged as they stepped into the other room.

There was a second's scuffle, and then a pale, starved-looking creature sat helplessly on Billy's lap. On the table in the gaunt room was a lighted candle and a mass of manuscript tied with black ribbon. The first sheet had been torn off and was half charred. Lingo Dan

was tapping the blackened sheet of paper on the table.

"To think," said Lingo Dan, as if he were addressing the room at large, "that we were next door to a murderer!"

The man in Billy's grasp started weakly. "A murderer?" he echoed querulously. "A murderer?"

"Why, yes, a murderer. Some murder bodies and some—souls. What's this, if not your soul?" Lingo Dan lifted up the manuscript.

The other tried to laugh. It was a something uncannily like a sob. "I take it," he said, "that you are more in practice as to bodies. At any rate, this fellow's hands hurt damnably."

"You may let him go, Billy." Lingo Dan, the manuscript in his pocket, went to the door and closed it tightly.

"And now sir—"

"Oh, cut it short," interrupted the owner of the room. "And now, you are going to say, I suppose, in some horribly stale phrase or other, my money or my life! You can have both, for they are neither of them worth a tinker's damn. The only thing in the world that I once valued is in your pocket. You are welcome to it. For heaven's sake, take it and go. Perhaps the ragmakers will buy it; it might make paper enough, when my soul has been boiled out of it, for some one to write my obituary on. Why

don't you go? Was it any business of yours if I burnt the thing?"

"You will excuse this intrusion, my good sir, when I have explained. We have watched you for weeks. We have seen you—never mind how—burning the midnight candle, fighting the bitter fight of creation, and we have become interested. We knew when the work was done, and we have wondered, since then, how soon you would come home glowing with victory. Just now we saw you accepting defeat like a coward, and then—attempting murder." He tapped the manuscript significantly.

"You have a turn for phrases. Are you a writer, too?"

"I? Oh, my soul—Billy, he insults us! Are you a writer, Billy?"

Billy's answer was a mere inarticulate grunt.

"Perhaps," the writer went on in his weary voice, "you are burglars. You certainly look it. I can easily imagine disappointed authors taking to the most heartless crimes. Still I fail to see where I am to profit you much." He looked grimly about the room. "You note the splendor of these furnishings. Such as it is, it is unpaid for. If you decide to do away with me—would you mind paying the rent? Perhaps you are murderers? But there is no insurance on my life. And I have no interesting disease that might make my carcass valuable to

a hospital. Such as I have is a dreadfully vulgar ailment." He spat as he spoke and some faint fleck of blood showed on his lips. "You see, a most prosaic case." He walked up and down the room a couple of times and then summoned up some show of fierceness. "Why don't you go?" he said. "Do you enjoy gloating? Are you realists? Is the suffering of others a delight to you? Is—" A gust of coughing came over him, and he fell to a chair with his breast heaving between his close shoulders and his hands gripping the woodwork. His control went from him as the coughing loosed the tension of his nerves, and he put his head down suddenly and began to moan.

"My play," he moaned, "my beautiful play!"

And then for a few moments it was still in the room save for the sound of a man wheezing in bitter pain.

"A play, you said? A play?" Lingo Dan had come over to where the man sat, and had put his hand upon his shoulder. "Why, then, you mustn't lose all heart! Be a man, be a man. Listen: You talked of murder and of burglary; well, we are all that, Billy and I; but, mark you, something more, we are, before all else, gamblers. You want your play produced, and all the managers in town refuse to stake themselves upon it, is that not true? Well, what if Billy and I should choose to

speculate and take and put it on and stand or fall, with you?"

The playwright frowned and smiled and frowned again.

"A fantastic jest," he said, "one does not produce plays on wind and dreams."

"Most true. But, can you eat mere wind and dreams? Again most true; you cannot. If you will sup with us, in an hour or two—on real food and real drink—perhaps you will believe me better. And, meanwhile, may I read the play?"

"You are quite mad." The playwright laughed. "All the rest of the world has been most sane, it has refused even to read the play. If I am to dine with you I might wish that you postponed your reading until the meal was over. I hate to dine with a man whose humor has been spoiled. But have it your own way; the play's in your pocket; put it into your head if you want to. All I want's food in my stomach."

"But you must promise," said Lingo Dan, with his hand on the door, "that there shall be no more murder between this and dinner. No soul-murder, no body-murder."

"Oh, said the playwright, reaching for a pair of scissors, "I shall employ the interval in nothing but dressing for dinner." And he began to trim the ragged fringes from his cuffs.

* * * * *

When they were again in their own room Lingo Dan picked up a scrap of paper that lay on the table. "Do you remember," he said, "what we were discussing before that mercurial person next door gained my attention?"

"Sure thing," said Billy, "we was figuring up what to do wid the boodle."

"Exactly. It is the greatest haul we have ever made. Think of it, Billy, twenty thousand dollars! As we said before, it is enough to retire on. We could afford respectability. Let me think, what was it you said you would prefer?"

"Running a liquor-store."

"To be sure. That was your ideal. What was mine again? Oh, yes; a cottage in the country, with vines and roses, and good books, and some one to play the violin for me now and then, and a good brand of tobacco to color the house as one colors a meerschaum. Or, again, you may remember, we had discussed the question of traveling far over seas, of devoting our lives to little philanthropies, of going, perhaps, to England, assuming decent if fictitious names, and passing to the next world as sober, beloved vestrymen. It is easy to be respectable on twenty thousand dollars. Against all this, however, you will remember, Billy, that we had to consider the killing quiet of the thing. Do you think we can stand

quiet? That was about the point we had reached when—interrupted. My alternative was speculation. Did I understand you to say, Billy, that if I decided on speculation you would lose or win with me?"

Billy grunted a "Yes."

"The man," continued Lingo Dan, "has but a matter of months to live. Even you, Billy, with your callousness, could see that. He is a clever man; something tells me that. If his play were produced his light would go out smilingly." He sighed a little. "Billy, when I was young—pardon me if I talk of ancient history!—I had ambitions. I know what it means when the frost touches them. The frost is reaching for the one thing in this man's life that he has thought worth while. Suppose we speculate and keep the frost away? What do you say? We might, you know, Billy we might make a hundred thousand. There may be a fortune in it for all three of us. To say nothing of keeping the frost from that poor fellow's final days. Do you follow me, Billy?"

"You mean, if de play wins, we'se all on de sunny side, and if it's a frost it's a cold day for us."

"Precisely, Billy. A most accurate summing up. And now, Billy, I shall read the play."

* * * * *

A week later Lingo Dan came into the room where Billy sat. "It is settled," he said, "we are embarked as impressarios. Our friend was right, Billy, there was not a manager in town would take the play. They are afraid of it. It is is a satirical comedy, and most of the satire strikes at the audience. It is brilliant, it is erratic, it is not conventional. The managers don't understand it; what they don't understand they fear. Our friend—do you remember, Billy, that his name is Jermyon, and that you must stop calling him 'the consumptive guy'—has written a play so good that it cannot possibly succeed. And yet," as he saw an oath coming to Billy's lips, "there is just the off chance that the public may bite at a bait it can't see through. We may make that fortune. Who knows? And think of the fever of speculation, Billy. For we are in the game now. Since nobody would take it as a risk, I have guaranteed the risk. It is to be put on at Weekman's Theatre. Presently you will see the public prints announcing a new comedy, 'Fiornella,' by a new author. You will read weird tales of Jermyon's ways of life; his eccentric pretense of poverty, and all that sort of thing. We pay for that publicity, Billy, you and I; those are part of the stakes in this gamble of ours. We pay, in fact, for everything. We pay for the theatre, the production, the costumes, the advertisements — everything.

But, bless you, the public doesn't know that. It thinks Manager Weekman has really been clever enough to find a brilliant comedy on his own account, and risk his capital on the venture. Ah, my good Billy, one can do almost anything with money. One can put a play onto the stage and afterward, if necessary," he stopped and smiled to himself as if at a tender thought, "one can even buy the semblance of prosperity."

Billy went on smoking and looking out of the window.

"I wonder, Billy," Dan went on presently, "if he will live to see the play. Has he been coughing today?"

"To beat the band," was Billy's affirmative.

"Poor fellow. Well, it oftens happens so. He has put himself too much into that play; some of his body and some of his soul is there. How shall a man's frame be strong when he has spent so much of himself? The way to success does not lie there, nowadays; the thing to do is to husband your little grain or two of talent, and sow it on ground prepared by flattery and tilled in sycophancy, water it with the mediocrity that will be understood by the vulgarians, and give it the sunshine of your toadyism to the conventions. That is the way to succeed in art, and in life. I'm sure you agree with me, Billy? Eh? Ah, yes; I see; the excess vigor of your profanity proves that

you hold my views exactly. Were ever two people so alike in points of view as we, Billy?"

* * * * *

It was some ten days after the first night of "Fiornella," but the memory of that occasion was still vivid.

As the curtain went down upon the closing scene a sudden tumult of applause went surging through the theatre. Men looked at each other and smiled and flushed, as they beat their hands together, and only the women stood in wondering amaze. For the women had been sitting for two hours in utter daze; to them the brilliant humor on the stage before them was all a lurid tangle of absurdities. But the men applauded fiercely, and the darkest corners rang with the cries for "Author!"

They had brought him on in an invalid's chair, and then, for the first time, a sudden sympathy had come to even the women's eyes, and the smiles and flushings of the men had given way to a great surge of genuine emotion. As the chair was wheeled to the centre of the stage, and the jaded first-nighters saw the white figure of the slender creature who had wrought so strong a comedy that they could not understand it, old men began to search their memories for an equally affecting sight. When Jermyon put up his hand at last you could have heard the swinging of a woman's fan.

"I thank you," he said, simply, "This is what I have lived for."

And then the theatre had been emptied of its crowd, with much talking, and whispering, and laughter. And all the critics had smiled at each other in a furtively cruel way, and the men had looked at their wrecked gloves with a smile as if they had something in mind that was atonement for all the torn gloves of a year.

That night, very late, there had been a supper in Jermyon's room, and he had been a very fountain of laughter and brightness, and he had asked Lingo Dan again and again how he had ever managed to persuade Weekman to take the piece, and how he was content, now, to die.

And Lingo Dan had talked much fantastic nonsense about plays and about the public, and trodden frequently on Billy's foot, because Billy was drinking too much champagne and occasionally making remarks that Jermyon did not understand.

And since then there had been eulogistic notices cut from the papers and brought to Jermyon day by day. The excitement of that night had reacted, and he was sinking hourly nearer to the end. Yet if his body waned his soul glowed as it never had before. He was all dreams for "Fiornella;" he thought of it bringing his name to immortality; he was full of wondering optimism, as he scanned the daily

box-office receipts—wondering at the public's being so much more intelligent than he had supposed.

And now a doctor had just left his room and was talking, in the adjoining chamber, to Lingo Dan.

"Another hour or so is all." The doctor put on his hat and went out.

Lingo Dan turned to Billy. "It seems cruel, Billy, but I am glad our little mummery is soon too end. My nerves are failing under the strain of so much forgery and so much mendacity. And yet, think what we have done, Billy. We have given a beautiful imitation of a successful play! Has it not been a delightful speculation? Think what we have learned about the purchasing power of money! How easy it is to ape success! To stimulate the applause of a first-night is a bagatelle. To bias the critics is a harder matter. But, it can be done. Not grossly, stupidly, Billy, by mere money in hand, or mere dining and wining. Oh, no. Today's finesse is finer in these little things. When I wanted a critic to praise 'Fiornella' I bought one of that critic's plays first, or promised to produce it; they all have plays somewhere in some shamefaced hole. Yes, Billy, you can do all those things—but one thing you cannot do, not even with money: you cannot make the paying public come to your play if they refuse to like it. I have

forged the box-office statement for Jermyon every day, and he thinks of nothing but full houses every night; but, Billy, you and I know that if we had not given tickets away as industriously as a new paper gives away sample copies the performers in 'Fiornella' would have played to the orchestra. I have deluged the newspapers with the most startling stories that even a press agent ever achieved in this town; but—we lose, Billy, just the same, we lose.

"We have chosen to gamble, Billy, and we have lost. To your little rumshop, and my little cottage, we have preferred the hazards of speculative promotion. And—we lose, we—"

There was a faint cry from the next room, and the two went in silently. Jermyon was gasping and struggling for breath. He beckoned to Lingo Dan.

"Your hand," he whispered.

"Cheer up, old man," said Dan, "cheer up. This will pass."

"No; this is the curtain. But I don't care. I die; but 'Fiornella' will go on. Won't it, Dan; go on, and make you rich? I make you heir. The taste of its success is sweet enough for me; death can't take that away." He lay still for a minute or so, and then he spoke again, "You're not sorry you speculated, Dan?"

"Sorry, when I see your smile, and when I count the daily profit—"

"And you're not sorry, Billy?"

"Sure, no."

"You kept me from murder once, Dan. And now you've given back my soul and introduced me to Happiness, and what have I done for you? I wish I could do something before I go. The money's nothing. You're welcome to that, but I don't believe you care. All I can do is say God bless—"

There was a choking and a shivering, and the eyes stared ghastly in their sockets, and then the author of "Fiornella" lay dead.

It grew dusk and still the men by the bedside never stirred. Then, suddenly, Lingo Dan got up and turned his pockets inside out.

"Behold the fortune 'Fiornella' made," he laughed.

"All gone?" asked Billy.

"Every cent. We stand today just where we did—before we foolishly thought of retiring from our activities. We have gambled and we have lost. And yet, perhaps, we won."

"Won? How?" There was vast disgust in Billy's tone.

Lingo Dan took Billy by the arm, and lit the candle by the dead man's bed.

"He almost blessed me, Billy."

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH THERE IS A GLIMPSE OF ARCADY

Against the roar of traffic over the crowded granite the man's words were impotent. You could see his lips move; the swing of his right arm waved monotonously in the memory, perhaps; for the rest, his was but a solitary figure in the street-mass, unheeded, unimportant.

If you stood still and listened, you could catch the few words he drawled out now and again. "Three pairs for a nickel; 5 cents for three pairs." And the black leather strips pendant over his arm emphasized his phrase with a mild insistence.

However long the curious might pause and observe, it was rarely, indeed, that any reward came to both their endeavors; the man who had seen this gaunt figure, this lace-peddler, actually achieve a sale was hard to find.

It was a day of spring. The sun glistened on the puddles the night's shower had left in the streets. Something soft, something of a

caress was in the air. The sky-scraping buildings of the town seemed to be preening themselves for their summer's flirtation with the sun.

The swinging of the black laces, and the unheeded intoning of the peddler's war cry suddenly ceased. "Hallo, friend William!" he said.

The individual addressed gave a curt nod. His physical endowments were on a par with that nod; he was closely knit; shortnecked, stumpy. He, too, had a bunch of black laces hung over his arm.

"And how," continued the tall, thin individual, who had first spoken, "how have the Fates been pleased to disport themselves today? On a day like this, when all the air seems like a kiss, surely even the Dread Three must feel the impulse of kindness, surely——"

"Aw, stow it! I ain't made a sale this whole d—d morning, an' you know it!"

"Do I, indeed, Billy, do I, indeed? The excess of your emphasis, my dear companion, impugns the excellence of your veracity. How—tell me!—how should I know the slender progress of your luck? Perhaps, you would infer me to have gauged your status by my own misfortunes? Ah, well—I confess." He sighed, smiling. He stepped down from the doorway that had held him. He put his hand on Billy's arm.

"Suppose," he said, with a whimsical twist of the lips, "that we leave for a while the scene of our stupendous toil. Suppose we tread a measure on the primrose path!" He heaved his narrow shoulders forward, drinking in a long drain of the soft spring air; then, putting a lean hand to his companion's elbow, he sauntered off with him.

As they passed, even in those harried thoroughfares an occasional smile followed this curious twain. The one so thin, so fantastically pale, so like some haunting memory of Don Quixote and Dick Turpin rolled together; the other so squat, so animal, so ugly. The one with such curious droppings of a stilted eloquence that yet unmistakably rang of the gentleman, the collegian; the other of a dumbness broken only by excursions into the profane or the vulgar. No wonder people smiled at them!

Presently they were come to a grassy space that lay before the water's edge. They found a bench; they sat down. With a sigh of content the taller man stretched his long legs out to the growing grass, locked his fingers at the back of his head and gazed out to the farther waterways.

"Heigh ho!" he said softly. His eyes had the far-seeing stare, the film of dreaminess. "Billy," he went on, "did you use your eyes

today? Did you see the procession of beautiful human animals? Did you note the Spring shining in their faces, dancing in their sinews? Did you? No? Ah—Billy, you lack, I fear me, the proper eye of the Beholder. To let the ugly go; to see only the fair things of life; how delicious—and how difficult! And yet, once—” He stopped and smiled upon his companion. “You may scarce believe me, Billy, but today as I saw the sunshine, and the fair women, it came like a leap into my blood, the old, old, springtime impulse of dear youth, the which,” he added more softly, “is Love!”

Billy growled and attempted another position. “Hell,” he remarked, “but these benches is hard!”

“Why,” the other went on, heedless of Billy’s inattention, “must it be only Youth that turn to love? Why is there for us who are touched by grayness only Memory? Ah, well, not all of us have even—that! I, at least—*Ich habe gelebt und geliebet!*—and on a time I have been king in Arcady. Have I ever told you of that? It was—ah me!—how long ago that was!

* * * * *

“It was the year I came of age.

“The world was sweet to me. When one has youth, and when the land of books lies

just behind, and there is coin enough to stave off care—it's little of the darker sides one thinks about. I had the taste for travel; the closeness of the college walls had sharpened it. I went abroad.

“What does it matter where it was? Perhaps it was in Schwalbach, when the wild strawberries blushed loudly for the picking; perhaps it was at Eisenach with the chimes of the Wartburg singing along the dusk; perhaps it was on the Corso or on Prince's Street. What would it profit you to know?

“But it was May, I know; the lift of spring was on the breeze; the blossoms drooped over the hedges, and the scent of flowers hung over the earth.

“There was a corner where the acacias fell beyond a wall so that they made a archway for the path. I was idling on, thinking of a melody. And then, suddenly, under the white acacias came a vision, a dream!

“Ah, it is so long ago! But how vividly I can still see her! A vision in a wonderful bit of a gown, all black and white, with little white cuffs; with a hat of a daintiness I could never describe; with the pinkest cheeks! She carried a frilled and fluttering parasol; it came like a halo behind her.

“And young! Dear God, how young she was! I think it is forgiven me now, the audacity of the boy that then was I. How shall the

eyes of One-and-Twenty pass a woman and a fair one coldly by? The blood went spouting up to redden my cheeks; I felt my eyes grow dim as she came nearer. Besides, I could have sworn that her eyes, too, smiled a little. At all events, before those eyes had passed, I—Heavens, the dear folly of it!—I lifted my hat!

“Not boldly, you know, not with the bravado of impudence. No—there must have been, I suppose, some hint of worship in my face; or else—how easy for her to have frowned and passed and shuddered! But no; she smiled, even as she gave rebuke.

“‘I do not think,’ she said (and sometimes in my dreams I still hear that voice!) ‘that I know you.’

“‘A misfortune,’ I blushed, ‘that you can do much to rectify.’

“‘And so you think it a misfortune?’

“‘A very grievous one. If I—’ I stopped. I could not say it. It would sound like an empty shell, a hollow compliment, though the blood in me leaped with its sincerity.

“‘Yes, if you—’ Through a lifetime of *Weltschmerz* I can still see her smiling encouragement.

“‘If I were asked what fortune was, I should say it was to know you and—be liked by you.’

"She laughed a little. 'You are extravagant,' she said. But she laughed. And I was walking beside her, tremulously happy, keenly conscious of her smiling lips, her laughing eyes, the proximity of her gown, the faint perfume of her lace.

" 'It is very absurd of me to allow you to accompany me,' she said, presently, looking up at me.

" 'It is never absurd to dispense charity,' said I.

"Past the lawns and the gardens we walked; she full of roguish playfulness, I blindly, foolishly bathed in the mist of a devotion.

"She stopped as we came to a fountain that played over some lazy goldfish. 'Of course,' she said, though she still smiled, 'we will never see each other again. For a whim I, instead of frowning and raising my eyebrows, I—'

" 'You were merciful,' I interrupted. 'And as you have been merciful once, why not continue so? Why am I not to see you again?'

" 'It is impossible, unthinkable. Besides—' She read, or thought she read, the romantic dreams in my young brain, 'will it not be much more delightful to leave the episode here, just as it is, a mystery?' Again the ripples showed upon her lips. 'A pleasant mystery,' she added.

"She stood there, leaning on her parasol, one foot on the stone ledge about the fountain.

I can see her now. How fair she was! And how inevitable that I should refuse to shut myself out from the hope of seeing her again, I, who was young and so full of dreams!

“‘No,’ I said, ‘if I may, I must see you again.’

“‘Supposing,’ she said, scratching the point of her parasol about the graveled walk, ‘that I were engaged, or married—or anything dreadful. It would be wrong, would it not, for both you and me to see each other again? You do not know who I am—’

“Again I interrupted her. Youth can be so rude, even in its compliments! ‘I know you are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, and the most delightful!’

“She looked down, and now, as I recall the thing, I think she sighed. ‘It is a pity,’ she went on, ‘that one cannot keep one’s illusions. Take my advice; keep this one at least! Never see me again; keep the memory as it is.’

“But I protested fiercely, and in the end she allowed me to know that she might walk this same path on the following day. I was not to watch wither she went after we parted; so much of mystery she insisted upon.

“There came, thereafter, a month of heaven. A heaven in which there was the allurements of the mysterious, perhaps even the forbidden, and the charm of an ever growing fascination.

Sometimes we would go together to the Public Gardens and hear the band from the Jaeger-Regiment. Sometimes I took her rowing down the river. Always she treated me with something of humorous gentleness. It was maddening, even though it was a happy madness, to feel that I was no nearer to penetrating the mystery. Why could she not tell me who she was, I asked myself.

"Ah, if Youth but knew! Why could I not have believed her, when she said it would be better to leave the matter just a pleasant memory? Why not? Ah, how could I, when she stood before me, with the velvet glamor in her eyes, and the sunshine in her smile? Youth has such wistful eyes, such rushing blood!

"Besides, to know such a wonderful girl as this and give up all hope of winning her for one's own, it was unthinkable! Her talk was so brilliant, her jests so many, her tenderness so sweet!

"So I went on seeing her, day after day, until one morning in July she said to me, quite gravely:

" 'Well, our little play is over.' "

"I felt my blood rushing to my face and then receding, leaving it white and tense. 'Our play?' I repeated, tonelessly.

" 'Yes,' she said, 'it has been a comedy we have played, you and I, and the end is here.

Oh, how I tried to keep you from it; how I tried! But—well, you must promise me that the comedy shall end in laughter, as it began.’

“I said nothing; I waited.

“‘I,’ she went on, ‘have been most to blame. I should have frowned; not smiled. But it is hard to frown—sometimes. And you—you have enjoyed being with me?’”

“‘It has been heaven!’ I said.

“‘You must not say such things,’ she declared. ‘It only makes the last scene harder for me. How I wish you had followed the advice I gave you, that first day, and left the riddle unassailed! How shall I ever make atonement?’ She looked me over wistfully. Suddenly she put her gloved hands on my shoulders and kissed me.

“‘Ah, *bon Dieu*, if I live to be a thousand, I shall feel that kiss, and hear the music of it to my dying day! A man tastes one such in his lifetime, and many go to their graves without even so much.

“‘He would forgive me,’ she sighed, as if to herself, as she turned; and then, to me, with a sad little laugh, ‘It is to remember me by. Tomorrow I go away. And you may not follow. I go away—with my husband, my husband, whom I love.’

“The world was a mist. Her kiss burned on my lips; her words in my ears. So it had

come, the curtain to the play! I seemed not to feel it, somehow; she was holding out her hand; I took it; she said goodbye smilingly; even so I echoed her.

“She was gone.

“I walked to the Gardens. The band was playing; I only heard her voice. The fashionables were strolling up and down; I only saw her face. The flowering bushes brushed my face; I only felt her kiss.

“Perhaps, if I had not gone thither, to that public place, I might have wept. In one’s youth, one can do so many brave, so many foolish things.

“Why should I tell how long, how much I mourned? Or if I accused her—no, I think I ever accused only myself. As I looked back, there was not a look of hers, not a tone of her voice, that I had seen or heard, that her husband might not have been by to see and hear. I knew now what she had meant when she murmured, ‘He would forgive me.’ And yet how, in some moments of anguish, I hated that man!

“And so—the dream was past, the vision fled. But the memory—ah, the memory is as fresh as if it had been yesterday. Through all the after years there has come to me, ever and again, the memory of that month that I lived in Arcady, and all my life—

“Ah, well—for me, there has only been one woman in the world. She showed me heaven for a moment; she kissed me.”

* * * * *

For some seconds longer he looked staringly into the past. Now he turned to Billy. “You are a delightful conversationalist, Billy,” he said, “you listen so well. Eh? I beg your pardon! Oh—h!” He smiled and stretched himself out along the bench.

Billy went on snoring.

THE IMITATOR

By PERCIVAL POLLARD

Of this key-novel, published anonymously in 1902, some copies of the first edition still remain.

SOME PRESS OPINIONS

"Whimsical, brilliant, absurd."—*The Bookman*.

"The keenest, cleverest bit of social satire that has appeared for a long time. * * *"—*Philadelphia Times*.

"Clever, daring, and epigrammatic."—*The New-Yorker*.

"The author deserves the thanks of the reading world for his presentment of the new wrinkle in our national costume. It may do us good to see ourselves as others see us."—*Chicago Journal*.

"The boldest, and withal, the sharpest 'skinning' that has been issued in this country since the days of the old pamphlet and lampoon. Frankly, it simply takes the hide off its victim. * * * The first victim is immediately recognized as Harry Lehr, the petted darling of society; the second is H. C. Chatfield-Taylor, and the third is Mansfield * * *"—*Kansas City Journal*.

"If its setting is hateful—life in New York—its handling is uncommonly delicate and fine, its plot peculiarly ingenious, its love story of rare beauty."—*Charles F. Lummis*.

PRICE, \$1.25.

WILLIAM MARION REEDY

PUBLISHER

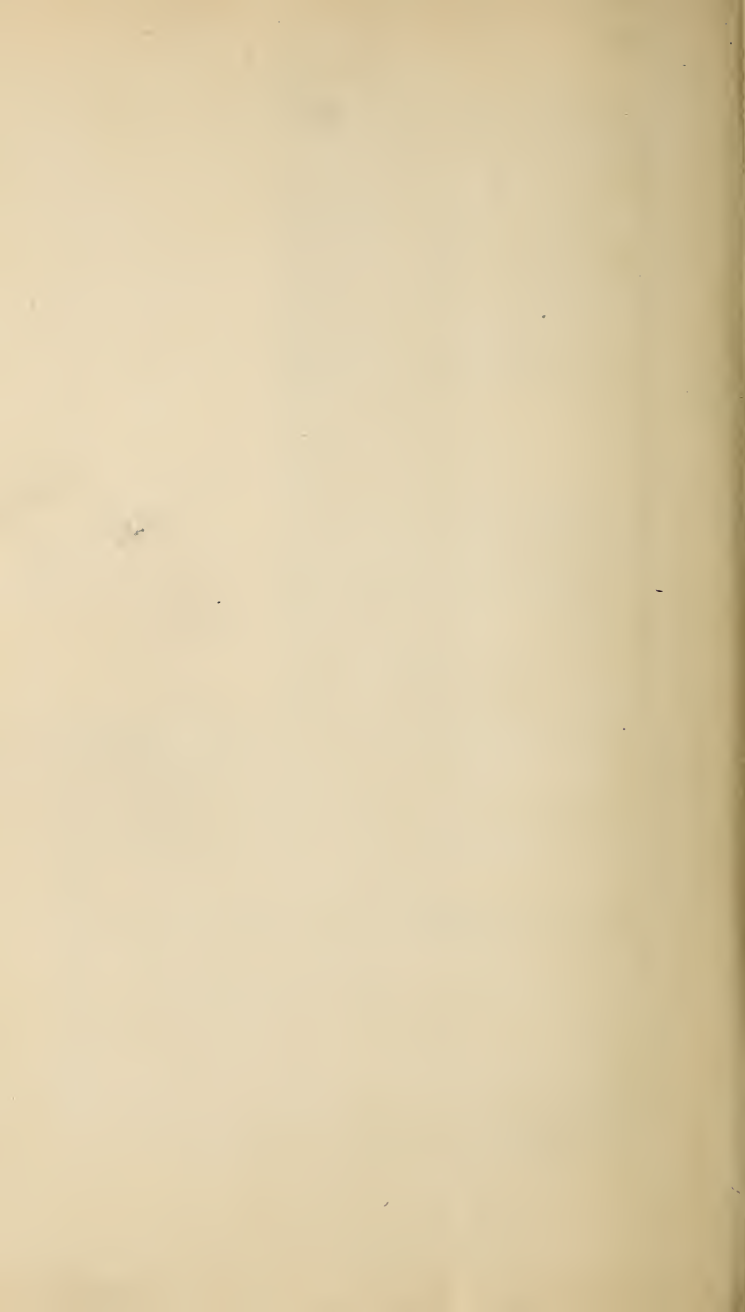
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

RARE BOOK
COLLECTION



THE LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH CAROLINA
AT
CHAPEL HILL

Mystery-
Detective
P355



3153 In - Scarce
—
Assigned to Ambrose Biscoe
by his friend Pollard.
—

